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THE ABDUCTION.

THE MASTER OF THE HOUNDS.

BY

"SCRUTATOR,"

AUTHOR OF

"THE SQUIRE OF BEECHWOOD."

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

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THE

MASTER OF THE HOUNDS.

CHAPTER I.

About the same hour, seated in the dining-room at Marston, after the ladies had retired, were Lords Mervyn and Vancourt, discussing with Vernon their future plans of operation.

"It is quite evident," remarked Vernon, "from Mrs. Harcourt's altered tone to Lord Vancourt, coupled with Miss Douglas's retreat to the Priory, that some person (most probably Mrs. Gordon) has thrown out very strong hints, if nothing more, about his lordship's position, and this week's delay may bring many things

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to light. Melville thinks the heiress is decidedly taken with him, and, to confess the truth, she gave him some cause for encouragement the night of the ball, and he will rake London over to establish certain reports about Lord Vancourt. The time for deliberation is past. Is it now your intention, my lord, to act or retreat?"

"Certainly not the latter!" replied Lord Vancourt, grinding his teeth with passion. "I will be revenged on Melville and the whole set, Conyers, Beauchamp, and Gordon; nothing shall turn me from my purpose now."

"To-morrow then," said Vernon, "we must make our arrangements '*sub Jove frigido*,' since walls, doors, and wainscots in this house seem to have ears; there is a traitor among us somewhere, of which I am well convinced, but we have spies in the enemy's camp also, who will give us all the information we require."

The week had expired, and Mrs. Harcourt's carriage was ordered to bring Miss Douglas back from the Priory, about ten o'clock in the evening, after a small party there,—when Mark Rosier suddenly made his appearance at Bampton, about nine o'clock, and jumping from a horse he

had borrowed of a farmer, rushed into the servant's hall.

"Where is Mr. William?" he enquired, in breathless haste, of his friend, John the footman.

"In the drawing-room," was the reply.

"Quick then, John, and whisper in his ear, 'Mark must see him this moment,'—lose not a second."

The message was delivered, and Beauchamp, springing from his chair, instantly darted from the room. Mark met him in the passage. "Quick, sir," he said in a low voice. "Your pistols, or Miss Blanche is lost!"

"Get my horse, Mark, and one for yourself, saddled directly, and I will run down to the stable-yard."

In five minutes, Beauchamp had put on a strong dark-coloured shooting jacket, with two brace of pistols in his pockets, and was galloping with Mark Rosier up the ride leading to the lodge gate. "Now, Mark, tell me what has happened, as we go along — where is Miss Douglas?"

"At the Priory, sir, I hope yet; but Mrs.

Harcourt's carriage is sent to take her home at ten; and that d——d rascally lord has got his travelling chariot, with four posters, waiting on the common, to intercept and carry her off to Scotland."

"How do you know this, Mark?"

"The ostler at Cherrington, sir, is an old friend of mine, and told me all about the horses being ordered, and fresh relays bespoke on the north road; and Tom Carter, my lord's footman, fished out something about it too, and ran out to my hiding place behind the Castle (where I have been the last three nights from dark till nearly daylight), about six o'clock this evening, telling me he overheard the valet and Lord Vancourt saying something about Marston Common at ten o'clock to-night. 'They are off, Mark,' said he, 'trunks packed and all, and you havn't a minute to spare;' so, sir, I ran down to the village, where my partners were, ordered them to go to the steep-hill beyond the common, with their air-guns, and hide themselves behind the hedge, to knock over the leading horses, and rescue the young lady, if we did not arrive in time."

"Well done, Mark," exclaimed Beauchamp, "here, take these two pistols, but don't use them, unless obliged to do so, to save your life —now come along," as, setting spurs to his horse, Beauchamp rode rapidly on towards the Priory. "Quick, to the back-door, Mark, and learn of the servants if the carriage has left with Miss Douglas,—if it has, give a whistle, and follow me as fast as you can; I shall keep on the road."

In a few minutes the shrill whistle of the poacher was heard, piercing through the house even to where Mrs. Gordon was sitting. At the signal, Beauchamp almost flew along at such a pace that Mark strove in vain to overtake him.

We must now relate what was occurring to Blanche Douglas, who, accompanied by her maid Alice, had left the Priory in Mrs. Harcourt's carriage, about twenty minutes before Beauchamp's calling there. They had proceeded about three miles; the night, although very misty, was (from the moon beginning to rise) sufficiently light to distinguish objects in passing, when Alice, who was looking through the window, suddenly exclaimed—"The coachman

has passed the turning-off to Throseby, Miss, and is driving on towards the common."

"Good Heavens!" replied Blanche, "where can he be going to? quick, Alice, put your head out of the window and ask him."

She had just done so, when the carriage stopped on the edge of the common, near a clump of beech trees, and Vancourt's valet, coming to the door, said Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt had dined, and were going to stay the night at the Castle, and had sent Lord Mervyn's carriage to meet her, and take her there; the other being ordered to return home and come to Marston in the morning.

Blanche, being greatly surprised at this information, was hesitating how to act, when Mr. Harcourt's coachman said,—"It's all right, Miss, you may depend."

"Now, Ma'am, quick, if you please," again interposed the valet, "I hear some farmers riding this way from market, and we are blocking up the road."

Still poor Blanche hesitated, — having an instinctive dread of some evil impending over her.

" Stay till the farmers have passed!" quickly whispered Alice to her mistress.

" We shall be run over," exclaimed the valet, " if you don't come directly, Ma'am."

" Stay, one minute longer, my dear young lady," again whispered her faithful servant, " I'm sure there's something wrong."

At this instant Beauchamp reached the scene, and, riding furiously up to the carriage, asked, in a stern voice, " What are you doing here, you scoundrels?"

The same story was again quickly repeated by coachman and valet, when Beauchamp exclaimed to the former, " Turn your horses' heads, this instant, back to the Priory, or I'll send this bullet (drawing a pistol) through your treacherous brains; and you, my Lord Vancourt's valet, are my prisoner," said Beauchamp, seizing him by the collar.

" Not if I can prevent it," said Lord Vancourt, suddenly presenting himself. " How dare you, sir, touch my servant, or interfere between Miss Douglas and her guardian's orders? She shall return to Marston Castle, even if force is necessary."

"Hah! hah!" shouted Mark, who had just reached the spot, "To Marston Castle, indeed! you mean Gretna-green! hah! hah! caught, my Lord Vancourt! caught at last!"

"Stand aside," said Beauchamp, jumping on the ground, and attempting to close the carriage door. "Miss Douglas is under my protection now."

"She is not, and never shall be," exclaimed Vancourt, vehemently, thrusting him violently away; and seizing Blanche by the arm, he tried to drag her forth.

"Villain!" shouted Beauchamp, now thoroughly roused, "take that for your insolence;" and he felled him with his fist, instantly, to the ground. At the same moment, Mark, putting his fingers to his mouth, sent forth a whistle, which echoed far through hill and dale, making the horses almost spring out of their harness.

"Hold them tight, Job," cried Mark, to Mr. Harcourt's coachman; "you don't move without the squire, mind, again to-night, or it shall be your last move on earth. Keep your box and sit still, or I'll knock you out of it, as I would a pheasant from his roost."

Lord Vancourt, recovering his feet, instantly levelled his pistol and fired, without effect, at Beauchamp, who, returning the compliment, shot Lord Vancourt through the left arm, breaking the bone above the elbow.

"Look out, sir!" shouted Mark, "here's more of the blackguards coming on," as three men rushed down upon them, who were soon in fierce conflict hand to hand, Mark plying his cudgel so effectually as to knock the foremost instantly off his legs, and Beauchamp conferring a similar favour on the next with the muzzle of his pistol; when the third, fearing the fate of his companions, drew his pistol and shot Beauchamp through the fleshy part of his body, under the shoulder blade. He staggered, but did not fall; and Mark, receiving at the same time a dig in the back from the dagger of the valet, smarting and rendered savage by the pain, shot Beauchamp's antagonist through the body. Meanwhile, Lord Vancourt, disabled but not subdued, with his right hand renewed his efforts to drag Miss Douglas from the carriage. Assisted by Alice, she was resisting with her utmost strength, when Beauchamp dealt him a

blow on the face, which broke his nose and sent him staggering into the road.

"Quick, my lord!" cried the valet, catching him in his arms and dragging him to his chariot, "I hear men running down the road,—all is lost—quick! or we shall be made prisoners!"

The hint was enough; the valet shut his master in, and springing on the box, the four horses bore them rapidly away from the scene of their disaster. The other poachers rushed quickly to the rescue of their leader, who was still grappling with one of his assailants, and the affair was soon brought to a close, although the issue of the combat, with heavy odds against them, had been determined already by the courage and prowess of Mark and the young squire, who fought like lions robbed of their prey.

"Now, Mark," said Beauchamp, "let your fellows hold these villains in custody, whilst I go to Miss Douglas."

Poor Blanche sat trembling in the carriage from excessive fright, almost unconscious of what was going on, when Beauchamp, opening the door, said, "Thank Heaven, you are safe,

dearest Blanche! Lord Vancourt has fled, and the poachers have secured the rest."

By the sudden transition from fright to joy, with other tumultuous feelings rushing through her heart, Blanche fell back on the seat fainting, when Alice cried out, "Quick, Mr. Beauchamp, support her in your arms whilst I get some salts from my pocket." In a moment her head was resting on his breast, while her maid was applying restoratives, which soon roused her from her swoon.

"Oh, where am I?" she faintly asked.

"Safe, my dear girl, in Will Beauchamp's arms," was the soft reply; "are you afraid of him, dear Blanche?" as she struggled to rise.

"Oh, no, dear William,—my kind, my noble preserver; but I am better now; let us return to dear aunt Gordon."

"That you shall, directly; I will be with you again in a moment."

Ordering Mark to bring the prisoners with the horses to the Priory, and telling the coachman to drive back there immediately, Beauchamp entered the carriage; and Alice, saying she would rather be outside to see they did not

take a wrong turn again, left the lovers together, and got up behind with the footman, who had all the time been standing at the horses' heads, to prevent their running away during the fight.

As they sat side by side, the blood from Beauchamp's wound trickled down on Blanche's arm, who, feeling the moisture, raised it to the light of the lamp. "Good Heavens, William," she exclaimed, turning pale, and in great alarm, "you are bleeding! oh, tell me where you are hurt!"

"Only a scratch, dear girl. Don't look so frightened! I assure you it is nothing of consequence!"

"Oh, what can I do for you, dear William?" she exclaimed, still in great terror.

"Nothing, dearest Blanche, but this,—if you really love me, may I have one kiss, which will heal all my wounds?"

No reply being given, Beauchamp strained her to his heart, whispering, "Oh, how thankful I am for this reward, dear Blanche! and for having saved you from such a fate."

"How thankful ought I to feel to you, dear

William, for risking your life to protect me from that dreadful man."

They had now reached the Priory, when, at the sound of the wheels, all the servants, with Mrs. Gordon also, rushed to the hall door in a body, having been terrified by Mark's sudden appearance at the back door an hour before, and fearing some dreadful work was going on, from the distant report of fire-arms, which had been heard even at the Priory.

When the steps were let down, Beauchamp handed Blanche from the carriage, who, throwing herself into her aunt's arms, burst into tears, sobbing convulsively on her bosom.

"My dear, dear child," exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, trembling with apprehension, "what frightful thing has happened? Your dress is covered with blood! Where are you injured, my dearest love?"

"Oh, nowhere, dearest aunt! I am not injured—but poor William (bursting again into tears) is, I fear, badly wounded. It is the blood from his side. Pray attend to him, and do not regard me."

"Run then to the dining-room, dear Blanche,

with Alice, and get some wine directly, while I bring him there. Now, William," said Mrs. Gordon, taking him by the arm, "what can have happened? And where are you hurt, my dear boy. Tell me instantly. You look faint and exhausted."

"Only a crack on the ribs, dear aunt," replied Beauchamp, smiling, "from that scoundrel Vancourt, who tried to carry off Blanche—nothing more; and a little bleeding will do me good after this hot exciting work."

"Don't be foolish, William. A glass of wine will do you most good at present. So come with me, and then I must examine your wound, whilst you tell me more of this horrid outrage."

Saying which, she led him into the dining-room, and made him lie down on the sofa, where Blanche brought him a glass of wine, trembling still, and shaking so much that she spilt half of it on the floor.

"Drink it yourself, dear Blanche," said Beauchamp, springing up, "and another, too, or I will not touch a drop. Sit down, my dear girl. I am not much hurt." Saying which, he poured her out a full glass, which he made her take,

and then filling one himself, said, before raising it to his lips, "Here's health and long life to Mark Rosier, the poacher, who has saved dear Blanche from that rascally lord's clutches!"

"Now, dear child," said Mrs. Gordon, "run up stairs, and change your dress, whilst I order tea to be taken into the drawing-room."

CHAPTER II.

As soon as she had left the room, Beauchamp was obliged to take off his coat and waistcoat and submit to Mrs. Gordon's inspection, who, cutting a strip from under his arm, laid bare the wound. "Indeed, William," she exclaimed, "it is a shocking bad place. I must send for the surgeon."

"Oh, pray, don't, dear aunt! I do not think there is any occasion."

"It must and shall be done instantly, and I will do what I can in the meantime."

Saying which, she rang the bell and gave orders accordingly; and, running from the

room, soon returned with her maid, who brought hot water and bandages, with which, after due fomentations, Beauchamp's side was carefully bound up.

"Now, dear aunt," he said, "after all your kind care and trouble, I feel quite refreshed and easy. Let us join Blanche for a cup of tea, and you shall hear the whole story of this night's adventures, as far as I know myself."

Lying on the sofa, near the fire, by Aunt Gordon's directions, Beauchamp was waited upon by Blanche, who placed a small table by his side, and her attention was more than repaid by his happy smile, when receiving these kind offices from her hands.

All he knew was related to Mrs. Gordon, who frequently interrupted him by exclamations of anger or surprise at this most daring outrage.

"And now, dear aunt," said Beauchamp, "if you will be kind enough to give me pen and paper, to write a few lines to Constance and my father, who must be alarmed at my absence, I shall be much obliged."

"That I will do for you, William; so remain quiet where you are."

The letter was accordingly written and dispatched immediately.

"That reminds me that I ought to apprise Mrs. Harcourt also of the events of this night, and the conduct of her *protegé*, Lord Vancourt; although I am resolved, after this disgraceful affair, Blanche shall not again return to Throseby."

"Oh, dear aunt!" exclaimed Blanche, "can you—will you keep me with you?"

"Yes, my love, I can and will do so, being your guardian equally with Mr. Harcourt."

A servant at this moment entered the room, to say that Mr. Harcourt's coachman had run away, leaving the carriage and horses in the stable-yard.

"Run away, did you say?" asked Mrs. Gordon in amazement.

"Yes, ma'am," replied the man, "and Robert the footman says he thinks he was bribed by Lord Vancourt to drive Miss Douglas to meet his Lordship's carriage on the common."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon,

"what a villain! you may go, John, and send the footman to me."

"Please, sir," said the man, addressing Beauchamp, "Mark Rosier wants to speak to you."

"Then send him here," replied Mrs. Gordon, "for Mr. Beauchamp shall not leave the sofa."

The tall, athletic, handsome poacher was soon ushered into the drawing-room, where he stood near the door, with a low bow to the ladies.

"Come here, Mark," cried Beauchamp, extending his hand, which the poacher seized and pressed to his lips, "you are a brave, honest fellow, and to your courage this night am I indebted for my life, and the safety of Miss Douglas—my gratitude for this service will end only with my own existence."

"Master William," said Mark, "I loved you when a boy, and have had much more cause to love you since I became a man, and I would willingly lay down my life to serve you at any time; but what's the matter, sir? where were you wounded by that rascally lord?"

"He missed me, Mark, but the other villain you knocked over shot me through the fleshy part over the ribs."

"Let me see, sir," said Mark, kneeling down by the sofa, "I have known something about gunshot wounds before to-day."

"It is all right," said Beauchamp, "Mrs. Gordon has kindly fomented and bound it up; "besides, Mark," he whispered, "there are ladies in the room."

"I beg pardon, sir," said the poacher, rising, "but I was only thinking of you."

"Now, Mark," said Mrs. Gordon, leading up Blanche, "it is our turn to thank you, my kind friend, for your valuable assistance this night;" and both shook him cordially by the hand.

"Welcome, right welcome, ladies," replied Mark, "and glad am I to see that dear young lady once more happy and safe; but, my lady, it were a near thing—that long-legged lord were just agoing to drag Miss Blanche from the carriage, when the young Squire (God bless him!) knocked him off his pins like a babby, and shut the door. Then up jumps my lord, and let fly a bullet at Mr. William, which (the Lord be praised for it!) missed un clean. The Squire then broke his arm—sarved him right —and with another rattler in the face sent my

Lord Longlegs spinning across the road, and I'll wager a pound he remembers the young Squire to his dying day. So you see, my lady, it warn't Mark, but Mr. William, that saved Miss Blanche from being half way on her road to Scotland by this time."

"There, Mark, that will do," interposed Beauchamp; "now sit down, and Miss Blanche will give you a cup of tea, and tell me about your own wound in the back."

"Ah, sir, that foreign coward thought he had me there nicely, but the velveteen and badger waistcoat stood my friends, and it's only a scratch after all—not half so bad as yours, sir. But what d'ye think, Squire? dang it all! our three prisoners are my Lord Mervyn's night watchers."

"What, Mark!" exclaimed Beauchamp.

"As true as you be lying on that sofa, sir; we knowed 'em directly we got to the light, sir; and one on 'em, that chap that shot you, Squire, has got something in his carcass, which don't quite agree with un quite so well as a figgy pudding."

"I hope he's not seriously hurt, though, Mark, and that he has been attended to."

"Yes, yes, Squire, don't fidget about him, for all the servants in the house have been waiting on and pitying the rascal, and we can't do more till the doctor comes; and then to think, Squire, that Mr. Job, the coachman, should have been in the plot, and sell his young mistress for fifty pounds! he has cut it, sir, already, and left Robert to drive the carriage home; so altogether, Squire, what with my lord's underkeepers, and Mr. Harcourt's coachman, there's a pretty kettle of fish boiled up to-night."

"Can all this be really true, Mark?" enquired Mrs. Gordon in surprise.

"As true, my lady, as that Mark Rosier is sitting down drinking tea and eating bread and butter in this chair."

"Oh Blanche! my darling child," exclaimed her aunt, folding her again in her arms, "what a set of villains have been plotting your ruin! and Lord Mervyn, too, with a daughter of his own. Poor dear child! you shall never leave me any more."

"That's right, my lady," chimed in Mark, "don't ever trust that dear sweet angel out of your sight again, unless with the young Squire,

or who knows that rascally lord may send another lot of ruffians down to carry her off again; don't let her go to Throseby no more, ma'am, for here Mark and the poachers will watch over her day and night."

"Really, Mark, after this fearful work, I think I must retain you and two of your men as my body guard."

"So you shall, my lady, and we will enter on our service to-morrow, and woe betide any half-dozen fellows who dare touch Miss Blanche again."

A ring at the hall bell was now heard, on which Mark, jumping up from his chair, said, "That's the doctor, ladies, and with many thanks for your kindness, I will run off and see how my patient fares."

Mr. Morgan, the sporting surgeon, now made his appearance, and after paying his compliments to the ladies, turned to shake hands with Beauchamp.

"Well, Squire," said the good-humoured doctor, "because you could not be hunting, you have been doing a little bit of fighting during the frost, eh?"

"Not willingly, doctor; but first step into the servants' hall, there's a worse case there—mine will keep—after that, I will go with you into the dining room, where you can examine my scratch."

"Well, as you please," replied Morgan, "if Mrs. Gordon has no objection."

"William appears much easier now," she said, "and as he wishes it, perhaps you had better go there first."

The doctor soon returned, telling Mrs. Gordon, with a very grave face, that the man was dangerously wounded by a ball through his body, although he believed no vital part had been injured. Yet that he required great care and attention, and ought immediately to be placed in bed.

"Do exactly as you consider best," replied Mrs. Gordon, "and tell the housekeeper to have everything prepared for him without delay."

"Thank you, my dear madam, for your kindness," said Morgan, as he again left the room; when Malcolm rushed in, with consternation depicted on his face, and instantly folded Blanche in his embrace, exclaiming, "My poor

dear girl! what an escape you have had from that villain! But, Will Beauchamp, are you much hurt, my brave, noble fellow! I heard the whole account from Harcourt's footman."

"Oh, not much, Malcolm, as you may see, by my enjoying a cup of tea."

The story was again told, when Malcolm said:—

"Upon my word! what with Lord Mervyn's keepers, and Mr. Harcourt's coachman, this is a most serious affair, and I will have it sifted to the bottom."

"Perhaps," suggested Mrs. Gordon, "for dear Blanche's sake, we had better let it pass as quietly as possible, and keep a strict watch over her for the future."

"And allow these villains to escape exposure. But besides, dear aunt, Lord Mervyn would assuredly take advantage of our weakness, and say the matter was hushed up by mutual consent. That Blanche was a consenting party to an elopement with Lord Vancourt, and which, he would assert, was only prevented by Beauchamp's interference—and this Lord Vancourt reported to be a married man! My dear aunt, you must see

Blanche's fair fame would be tarnished for ever by such an insinuation even. No, no! it's impossible to compromise this business; and I am resolved, for the honour of both our families, my cousin's and my own, that a thorough investigation shall take place. It is my province, as one of her nearest relatives, to clear her from all complicity or connivance with Lord Vancourt; and, my dear aunt, it must and shall be done!"

"Well, Charles, I believe you take the right view of the case, which is too serious to be passed over; but I think Mr. Harcourt will endeavour to hush it up on account of his friend, Lord Mervyn, and to screen himself, as his servant was concerned also."

"No doubt, aunt; but half-a-score Harcourts and Mervyns shall not prevent me discharging my duty to dear Blanche, and protecting her fair name from pollution with such a man as Vancourt."

Mr. Morgan put a stop to further conversation by just then returning to the drawing-room.

"Now, Squire," he said, "it is your turn, as my other patient is as comfortable as he has

any right to expect, if you and Lord Malcolm will walk with me into the other room."

Mrs. Gordon looking anxious, and Blanche pale at this announcement, from fear of Beauchamp's being subjected to more pain, Morgan assured them they need not be alarmed, adding with a smile:

"Rest satisfied, ladies. I will not hurt him for my own sake, as I don't want to be double-thonged when he gets into the saddle once more;" with which the three gentlemen walked off together.

After examining and probing the wound, which caused Will Beauchamp to wince a little, Morgan expressed his opinion that rest and quiet must be observed for some few days, and added:

"You may thank your lucky star, or guardian angel, that the ball struck your rib on the centre, my young friend, or you had been past all surgical aid. It's a confounded rascally business, altogether; and I hope, my lord," turning to Malcolm, "you won't let that old fox-killer up at the castle escape probing a little."

"You may depend, doctor, I won't spare

him, or any concerned in this outrage. And now let us return to the ladies, as I saw their anxious looks."

Morgan assured Mrs. Gordon she need be under no alarm on Beauchamp's account, whose wound would heal in a few days; but that he ought not to return home that night, and take only gruel or tea till he saw him again in the morning.

"Ah, my dear aunt," exclaimed Malcolm, when the door had closed on Morgan, "Beauchamp has had a very narrow escape; and thankful must we all be to the Almighty that he has been spared to us."

"My dear, dear boy," said aunt Gordon, affected to tears, and going up and kissing him, "what should I have done without you? and now you are dearer to me than ever."

"Pray don't give way thus, dear aunt," whispered Beauchamp. "You will distress poor Blanche, who, I see, is ready to cry, and she has had enough to-night to agitate her;—but let her bring me another cup of tea, as I feel rather thirsty."

"Come, Blanche, don't you follow the exam-

ple of your foolish old aunt, but take this to William."

As she handed Beauchamp the cup, he held her hand for a moment, saying, "Dear Blanche, how many will envy Will Beauchamp's scratch this night, which has given him such a cup-bearer; and how forcibly does your kind attention remind me of those beautiful lines of Scott:

"'Oh, Woman! in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
* * * *
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou!'"

The last word had scarcely passed his lips, when a carriage was driven furiously up to the hall door, and a voice heard shouting:

"Let me out! Open the door!"

"There's no mistaking that voice;" exclaimed Malcolm, darting from the room. "It is the old squire."

"How is my dear boy?" inquired Mr. Beauchamp, as he met Malcolm in the hall.

"Not much the matter, my dear sir, as he is

lying on the sofa, drinking tea, and quoting poetry."

"Quick! where is he?" he said to Malcolm, who was now speaking to Constance.

"In the drawing-room—here, this way—"

And in a moment, Mr. Beauchamp, regardless of the ladies, was kneeling by his son, ejaculating:

"Thank God! thank God! the Father of all mercies, that you are spared to me, my own darling boy!"

And the old man burst into a flood of tears, still repeating his thanks to God for preserving his son's life. Constance, throwing herself into Blanche's arms, gave vent also to her pent-up feelings, which she had repressed to keep up her father; but now, the tears of all three ladies fell uncontrolled, and even Malcolm was obliged to turn aside to conceal his emotion at witnessing this affecting interview between father and son.

"Come, come, my dear father," at length said Beauchamp; "this agitation hurts my side, and you have not yet spoken a word to dear, kind Mrs. Gordon or Blanche."

The old man rose slowly from his knees, and

going up to Mrs. Gordon, took her hand in his, which he held for some time, but all utterance failed him.

"I can't thank you now," he at last said, as the tears still rolled down his cheek; "and poor Blanche!" (whose hand he next seized) "thank Heaven! you are saved, dear child, from a fate worse than death!"

"Oh, Mr. Beauchamp," she sobbed; "I am the wretched cause of all your grief. What would I not give to save William one moment's pain?"

"Would you give this, dear girl?" (he whispered in a low tone, pressing her hand in his), "to make my poor boy happy?"

"Yes," she said softly, and blushing deeply; "all I possess in the world."

"The wound in his side," said Mr. Beauchamp, "will, I trust, yield to the doctor's skill; but he has another, I suspect, which only this little hand can heal. Come with me, then, my own dear child, and be Will's comforter."

Saying which, he led her to the sofa; and, placing her hand in that of his son's, said in a whisper:

" There, Will, that will heal all your wounds ; and may the Almighty bless you both."

" Oh, Blanche !" murmured Beauchamp, as he pressed her hand to his lips, " how far beyond all my fondest hopes is this reward ! but, dearest, I must not claim it now, when you are overpowered with gratitude."

" Will you refuse, then," she said, softly, " to make me happy ?"

" No, no, my own dearest girl; not if love only prompts you to bestow this unlooked-for blessing on me. Is it so, dear Blanche ?"

" Yes !" was the faint response.

" Then am I blessed, indeed," replied Beauchamp, " and now, dearest, you have been so excited to-night, I hope you will retire to your room with Constance. I shall quickly follow your example, as I know aunt Gordon is gone to order beds for us."

During this scene, Mrs. Gordon and Malcolm had silently left the apartment, leaving Mr. Beauchamp and Constance only with the two lovers. The former now appeared, saying, " I have ordered a double-bedded room, Mr. Beauchamp, for you and William, as I knew you

would not like to leave him to-night; and the tray to be brought in directly, with something more substantial than tea; and now, dear William, you must go with me to your room, where Malcolm is preparing everything for your comfort, with a large basin of gruel, which he declares none but a Scotchman can make.

" Oh, very well," cried Mr. Beauchamp gaily, " then, you are going to desert me entirely, I conclude."

" Only for a short time, as Charles will join you directly, who declares he is as ravenous as one of his own mountain eagles. Now, children," continued Mrs. Gordon, as she led Beauchamp out of the room, " kiss your father, Constance, and follow me." In a moment she was in her father's arms, and when released from his embrace, Blanche held out her hand to wish him good-night — " No, dear child, that will not do now—come to my heart—I have found another daughter, and you a father, if you can love me as such."

" Oh, indeed, I will," she replied.

" God bless you, my own dear Blanche," murmured the old squire, as he pressed her in

his arms, and kissed her again and again. "There, child, now run away; you and Will have made a woman of me to-night."

On the landing-place, Beauchamp waited to wish his sister good-night, where he was left a few minutes by Mrs. Gordon, and having pressed her to his breast in a warm embrace, Blanche tripped up the stairs, and was in his arms before she was aware of the act, when, hastily impressing a kiss upon her lips, he whispered,—"God bless you, my dearest treasure; I shall now rest the happiest of the happy."

"William," cried Mrs. Gordon, from the end of the gallery, "why don't you come to your room?"

"Coming directly, dear aunt;" with which he turned away.

CHAPTER III.

THE next morning Mr. Morgan paid an early visit to his two patients, whom he found progressing as favourably as he could expect ; although the watcher could not be considered out of danger for some few days. " Do you think, doctor, I shall ever get over it ?" asked the sufferer.

" I hope so," replied Morgan, "although there's no saying how it may turn ; but keep a good heart, and make a clean breast from last night's work and all your other transgressions. Mrs. Gordon's kindness to you, and your narrow escape from murdering the young Squire, demand a full confession of all you know about this infernal business—out with it—a clear conscience

makes an easy bed, and you will feel all the better for it."

"It shall be done, doctor," said the man, "let the consequences be what they may!"

Blanche Douglas was so fevered from the fright and excitement of the previous night, as to be unable to leave her room until late in the day. After eleven o'clock, visitors began to pour in from the neighbourhood; the news of Blanche's attempted abduction having spread like wildfire. Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt drove to the Priory immediately after breakfast, and were loud in their expressions of astonishment at Lord Vancourt's conduct.

"And what could you expect," asked Mrs. Gordon, "after making such a fuss with that good-for-nothing man, and accepting him as my niece's suitor without making the least enquiry about his character or connections? I am quite surprised at *you*, Mr. Harcourt, acting so rashly; who, as her guardian, were bound to make the strictest investigation into the affairs of any stranger who proposed for your ward's hand!"

"I confess," replied Mr. Harcourt, "I trusted too much to Lord Mervyn's representations; but

although Lord Vancourt has acted so precipitately in this matter, yet there is no proof that he is such a character as you represent him to be."

"That proof will not be long wanting," retorted Mrs. Gordon.

"We need not now enter into these discussions," replied Mr. Harcourt, "as we have come to take Blanche home."

"Her home," said Mrs. Gordon, "for the future, will be at the Priory; or at least until such time as the fullest enquiry is made into this business, which Lord Malcolm is determined to prosecute to the utmost."

"And, pray, what has Lord Malcolm to do with it, Mrs. Gordon? I am her guardian, and the proper person to act in her defence."

"You cannot be surprised, Mr. Harcourt, that Lord Malcolm should entertain some doubts on that head, when he finds your own coachman implicated in the attempted abduction of his cousin, as well as Lord Mervyn's under-keepers, who are now in custody. In short, under these circumstances, Lord Malcolm, as her nearest relative, has resolved that Blanche shall remain under my protection, as I also am her guardian;

but should you think proper to question our authority for so acting, last night's transactions shall be laid before the Lord Chancellor, and we do not fear the result."

"Oh! I suppose," said Mrs. Harcourt, sneeringly, "Mrs. Gordon intends to keep her niece here, to marry her favourite, Mr. Beauchamp."

"Even if I did," replied Mrs. Gordon, "it would not be quite so bad as conniving at her being carried away by a married man!"

"Lord Vancourt is not a married man, and I defy you to the proof, madam!"

"Here it is then," exclaimed Melville, who had entered the room with Bob Conyers, and heard the last sentence. "Here is a copy of the marriage certificate of Edward, Lord Vancourt and Signora Marinetta, solemnized at Florence five years ago, and duly attested by witnesses. I have seen the original from which this is taken, and have already written to a friend at Florence to send me all further particulars."

"And what business is this of yours, sir?" demanded Mrs. Harcourt, rising in great indignation from her chair.

"It became *my* business, madam," replied Melville, "when *my word* was questioned the other night by Lord Vancourt at the ball, and it shall be my business still, to prove him what I then asserted he was—a married man."

"Oh, very well, sir," said the lady, ringing the bell violently for her carriage, "but you shall not marry my niece, notwithstanding."

"Were I so disposed," replied the Captain, "I should not be obliged, after what occurred last night, to obtain your consent;" at which the lady bounced out of the room into the Hall, followed by her husband,—where she remained until the carriage came round.

"Now, aunt Gordon," said Conyers, "as that worthy pair have decamped—where is Will Beauchamp?"

"In the blue room upstairs with Malcolm, having leeches applied to his side; but mind, Robert, you do not excite him by talking too much, as Mr. Morgan says there is much inflammation about his wound, and he must be kept quiet."

"You need not fear me," replied Bob, "and, in the meantime, Melville will tell you more of

last night's adventures and Vernon's elopement with Miss Mervyn; that's a capital joke, by Jove!—the biter bit."

The Captain stated that, having arrived that evening at Cherrington, he was standing in the hall of the hotel, waiting for his horse, when a carriage and four drove up, and Lord Vancourt staggered up the steps, supported by his valet, with his arm in a sling and a broken nose, telling the landlord he had been stopped by highwaymen on Marston Common, and requesting a surgeon might be immediately sent for to set his arm, which had been broken by a pistol shot. Being shown into a room, his valet went down into the stable yard, where he followed and heard him ask the ostler if Major Shirley's horses were ready (the name Lord Vancourt had assumed).

"'Ay, to be sure, and gone up the road an hour agone,' replied the man.

"'My master is Major Shirley,' said the valet, 'so how can that be?'

"'All gammon,' persisted the ostler; 'Major Shirley's gone, I tell ye, and a young lady along with 'un.'

"'A young lady along with him!' repeated the valet; 'what sort of looking person was she?'

"'Can't tell—boxed up tight together—doors shut and window blinds down—runaway job I expect—but there, that's no business of mine.'

"'Well,' exclaimed the valet, 'I must have two pair of horses out in ten minutes.'

"'Can't have what we haven't got,' replied the ostler, sulkily, 'there's only one pair left.'

"'Then the same leaders must go the next stage,' said the valet.

"'Speak to the master about that,' replied the man, as he turned away.

"The facts of the case were these. Vernon had resolved to carry off Miss Mervyn the same night, and having been annoyed by Lord Vancourt's refusal to pay him down the sum he had promised for his co-operation in the plot, calculating also on the hour Lord Vancourt would reach Cherrington, he determined to be beforehand with his lordship, and, by assuming the same name, to take advantage of the relays of horses ordered on the road, thinking by this *ruse* to baffle all pursuit of himself; in short, it

was diamond cut diamond, Vernon proving the sharpest of the two. This I have since learnt," said Captain Melville, "but I remained at Cherrington until I saw Lord Vancourt (after having his arm set and bandaged up, with a large plaster on his nose) enter his carriage, notwithstanding the surgeon's remonstrances, and drive rapidly away on the road to London."

Whilst Melville was telling his story to Mrs. Gordon, Malcolm, Beauchamp, and Conyers were in consultation about the prisoners, who had been kept at the Priory all night with a constable.

"Being a magistrate for the county," said Beauchamp, "Bob can take down the wounded man's depositions, who is willing to confess everything, by Morgan's account; and upon this, the other two, with Mark's statement and mine, can be remanded and brought before the bench, which sits the day after to-morrow, when I will endeavour to attend. But bear in mind they are well handcuffed, or a rescue will be attempted by Lord Mervyn's agents, although I shall give Mark some hints also."

"Who is to prosecute?" asked Conyers.

"I shall, of course," replied Malcolm, "for I know Harcourt will shirk, to save his own and Mervyn's character. And now, Beauchamp, I think, if well enough, you had better return home to-day with your father, or that spiteful Mrs. Harcourt will declare we are only keeping you here on account of Blanche. I intend to take up my abode at the Priory, and shall remain until all this is settled; in short, I am so disgusted with the Harcourts that I have sent for all my traps, and do not intend just yet, if ever again, to enter their house."

"Quite right, Malcolm," replied Bob; "it is the most shameful, disgraceful affair I have ever known, and no one will believe but that Harcourt and Mervyn had some concern in the plot; and my dear pet Blanche! what a fate has she escaped with that d——d rascal! Melville says you served my Lord out for it, however, Will, with a split nose and a broken arm. Gad! I should like to have seen you hit him off his legs, as Mark tells, like a nine pin."

"I was mad enough to have killed him," replied Beauchamp.

"And I wish you had," interposed Malcolm, "as he tried hard to murder you."

"I am thankful no lives are lost; and now we will go down till the governor is ready; but recollect, Malcolm, Blanche is now under your protection."

"It is not likely I shall forget either her interest or yours, old fellow," replied Malcolm; "and I expect you to take care of Constance for me."

"No fear of that," was the reply, as the two friends and Conyers descended the staircase.

Mrs. Gordon was much vexed at hearing Beauchamp's intention to leave the Priory with his father, but on his motives being made known, she was constrained to admit their force, and a compromise was effected by Constance remaining in his place.

The rage of Lord Mervyn on the discovery of his daughter's elopement with Vernon would be difficult to describe. This agreeable piece of information was communicated to him at breakfast the next morning, when the housemaid, entering the young lady's room to light the fire, found the bird had flown, and her bed had

been unoccupied. She had pleaded a bad headache the night before, and retired with her maid about nine o'clock, when, immediately bolting the door and changing her dress, she descended the back staircase whilst the servants were at supper, and running across two fields, through which a pathway led to the high road, she was there met by Vernon, with a carriage and horses all in readiness. The head-keeper also now acquainted his Lordship with the capture of his three watchers, who had been employed by Lord Vancourt in assisting to carry off Miss Douglas. Lord Mervyn raged and stormed about the house like a madman, accusing his servants of connivance in his daughter's escape, and vowing vengeance on the whole household. He saw at one glance that pursuit would now, after the lapse of so many hours, be useless. Betrayed, foiled, and outwitted by Vernon, imprecations loud and deep were vented furiously on his head. The failure also of Vancourt, with the capture of his men, and the probable exposure to the world of his own participation in the contemplated abduction of the heiress, drove him almost to frenzy. Again, to this succeeded

the reflection that he had lent Lord Vancourt five hundred pounds the preceding day to aid in his flight, which added fuel to the fire that was already scorching his very brain. In every direction, defeat and disgrace awaited him, and he rushed from the house, like a maniac, to cool his fevered and throbbing temples in the fresh air.

Not even a transient feeling of regret for his child dwelt a moment in his troubled breast, but anger only, and fierce, implacable revenge against her and Vernon for the disgrace they had brought upon his name. Against Beauchamp, too, he vowed eternal hatred for seizing his men and defeating his plans.

From this monster in human shape we will turn to those of more kindly feelings. Beauchamp, though his sufferings from the pistol shot had not much abated, felt impelled by a sense of duty and love to Blanche, to save her from further attempts at outrage, to attend the magistrates' meeting, where his evidence, with the confessions of the wounded man, was sufficien to obtain the commitment of the other two watchers to take their trial at the ensuing

assizes, to be held in March—Lord Malcolm being the prosecutor, who declared that every effort in the meantime should be made to arrest Lord Vancourt for his dastardly attempt to carry off his cousin.

"You must not suppose, gentlemen," said Lord Malcolm, addressing the bench, "that I, or any of Miss Douglas's family are actuated by the spirit of revenge in this prosecution; but for the honour of my family and hers, and to protect her from any further attempts of this sort, I feel bound to use my best exertions in bringing the chief perpetrators of such a cowardly, unmanly act to justice, and not allow the law to take its course only against the least guilty parties. The crime of abduction, bad enough in itself, has also in this case been most seriously aggravated by shedding of blood, and the very near sacrifice of two lives."

"You are most fully justified, Lord Malcolm," said Sir Lionel Markham, who presided, "in the course you intend to pursue, which is highly necessary, in a public point of view, to uphold the laws of the country, and prevent such outrages in civilised society. With which Mal-

colm, bowing to the bench, withdrew with his friend Beauchamp.

During this investigation, the large room of the Fox (a wayside inn, in the parish of Marston, where the petty sessions were held), was crowded to overflowing, and Lord Malcolm's determination to arrest Lord Vancourt was loudly applauded by the farmers and poorer classes.

"That's right, my Lord," said farmer Stubbins, as he was leaving the room, "doan't ye let the biggest villain of the lot escape just because he's a Lord; and there, to 'tempt to murder the young Squire, too—dang it all, my Lord, it be too bad, hanging ain't too great a punishment for such as he."

The result of these proceedings was quickly communicated to Lord Mervyn by one of his emissaries who attended to watch the case, although no attempt was made by his lordship to screen his men from the consequences of their aiding and abetting Lord Vancourt; in fact, he repudiated the whole thing, and openly expressed his hope that the watchers would be severely punished for daring to leave their places

on such an errand. This avowal he deemed necessary, to prove, as he expected, his entire ignorance of Lord Vancourt's intentions.

The next morning, Mrs. Gordon, with Blanche and Constance, drove over to Bampton, where they found Will Beauchamp lying on the sofa in the library. "I am come over on purpose to give you a severe lecture, William," said aunt Gordon, "for going yesterday to the magistrates' meeting, which, Mr. Morgan tells me, was a very imprudent act, and has increased the inflammation in your side. Indeed, if your father cannot keep you at home, I shall insist on taking you back to the Priory to see what I can do with such a wayward boy."

"My dear aunt," replied Beauchamp, "my presence was absolutely necessary yesterday, or I should not have ventured out in so cold a day; but I will now be a good boy, and remain in the house until my wound is healed."

"Will you promise me to keep this resolution?"

"Yes, certainly, dear aunt, if it will afford you any satisfaction."

"Very well, sir; and now, Constance, we

will take off our bonnets, as I intend remaining here till after luncheon."

As they were leaving the room, Beauchamp said, in what was intended for an injured tone, "Blanche, you have not shaken hands with me; have I offended you?"

"Oh, no," she replied, turning back and offering her hand; "how could you think so, William?"

"Then I will not think so," still holding her hand, "if you will shut the door and sit with me a few minutes till aunt Gordon returns." A deep blush mantled in her cheek, and her eyes were cast towards the door, as if wishing to escape. "Go, then, dear Blanche," said Beauchamp, "I read your thoughts—you would leave me; but why should you thus avoid me? Have I ever uttered one word in your presence offensive or repulsive to your feelings?"

"Oh, no, William, never; but I have been so nervous and agitated ever since that dreadful night."

"That you fear to be left alone even with William Beauchamp; but there is another

cause of dread, Blanche, from which I would release you, and if you will shut the door and sit with me only a few moments, that cause shall be explained. Don't fear me, dear girl! I will not presume on your confidence."

Blanche, without saying another word, closed the door, and returned trembling to his side, sitting down on a chair near him.

"You fear being left alone with me, Blanche, because you apprehend a renewal of that subject, which from this day shall not again escape my lips. My poor father, the other night, in his excited state, placed your hand in mine, hoping and believing our love was mutual, and, at the moment, no doubt, dear Blanche, your gratitude exercised a powerful influence over your feelings; but, dearly as I prize it, on such terms I could never accept the hand of Blanche Douglas,—gratitude must not be mistaken for love; and until such time as the excitement under which you then acted is entirely removed, I will not renew the subject nearest my heart—it would be ungenerous and unfair in me to do so. Moreover, you are young and inexperienced in the world, and I will not be so selfish

as to fetter you with an engagement to myself before you have had a fair opportunity of judging whether, on mixing more in society, you could still prefer me to all others."

"Then, William," said Blanche, sadly, "you do not love me as you have professed to do."

"Not love you, my own dear darling girl!" exclaimed Beauchamp, starting up and seizing her hand, "dearer, fifty times dearer, than my own life do I love you, and you only; and here I vow that no other but this dear hand shall ever be joined with that of William Beauchamp. You are my first and only love—the only one of womankind who has ever been pressed to my heart—the first and last."

"Oh, dear William, then why should you doubt my love for you, or think me less constant than yourself?"

"I don't doubt you, dear girl, but feared gratitude might now influence you."

"William, you are only now wishing me to confess I felt love for you before gratitude; so, to relieve your mind from all further anxiety in your present state of suffering, I will make that confession. Dear William," she said, blushing,

"I have indeed long loved you, and can never love another."

The words had scarcely passed her lips, before she was caught in his arms and pressed to his heart in a long embrace.

"This happiness quite overpowers me," he whispered; "a thousand thanks, my own, very own, dearest Blanche, for your generous candour; and now run up and take off your bonnet, and come sit by and comfort me. Will you, dear girl, without fear and trembling?"

"Yes," she replied, with a sweet, radiant smile, "until you are quite tired of my company."

"That will never be, Blanche, so make haste and return to me again."

The ladies now entered the room with Mr. Beauchamp, who met them in the hall. "But where," he inquired, "is Malcolm?"

"He is gone over this morning to call on Mr. Conyers," replied Mrs. Gordon, "but will be here presently to escort us home after luncheon, as we intend Mr. Beauchamp to taste some of your metheglin, which Constance says is equal to any Frontignac."

"Of course," said the old squire; "you would not suppose I should treat you and Blanche as morning visitors; but sitting within doors this fine day does not quite suit me; what say you to a walk instead?"

"Most willingly," replied Mrs. Gordon, "although we have only just taken off our bonnets, with the intention of sitting with William."

"One at a time is more than enough for him, and the most silent of the party the best, in his present state, whoever that may be; but on such a delicate point of distinction between ladies I shall prudently forbear to hazard an opinion, you must settle it therefore among yourselves, or cast lots who shall be the victim to listen to Will's complaints, whilst the rest are enjoying themselves in the open air."

"I think," said Constance, looking archly at her brother, "Blanche is decidedly the most prudent and silent of our party, and therefore I propose her remaining with William, only on the condition that she does not allow him to speak on any exciting subject; do you both agree to this?"

"Most willingly and cheerfully do I submit

to these conditions, if Blanche will not think it too great a penance to sit by a sick man's couch."

"No, William, indeed I shall not; so now, Constance, you may run away as fast as you please with aunt Gordon and Mr. Beauchamp."

"My dear, kind-hearted, and affectionate girl," said Beauchamp, when the others had quitted the room, "and do you think I would trespass on your gentle nature by detaining you here, when Constance and Mrs. Gordon are enjoying this beautiful sunny morning?—No, no, dear Blanche, you will be happier with them."

"Do you wish me to leave you?"

"What a question!"

"Well, then," she said, "I would rather remain with you, if I may, and as I promised to do."

"And you shall, my own dear Blanche; and now sit down in this chair, and tell me all about your friend Vernon's runaway match with Miss Mervyn, the particulars of which I have not yet heard. Come nearer, Blanche,—indeed I won't bite," said Beauchamp, laughing; "and having

promised Constance not to speak on any exciting subject, I must not make love, so you are quite safe, dear girl."

Encouraged by his frank though gentle manner, Blanche no longer dreaded being left alone with her lover; and their happy, confiding looks, when Mrs. Gordon returned from her walk, convinced her how pleasantly had passed the time they had been left together. Lord Malcolm arrived in time for luncheon, soon after which, in consideration of Will Beauchamp's inflammatory symptoms, Mrs. Gordon took her leave, forbidding him to leave the house until she called again.

CHAPTER IV.

The breaking up of the frost, the same evening, set the fox hunters once more in motion, and the first open day being as usual advertised for the kennels, a large assemblage of sportsmen mustered at Bampton, where genuine hospitality always awaited them, and sincere congratulations were offered to the old Squire on his son's narrow escape. The farmers especially, when William Beauchamp walked out on the lawn among them, pressed round him, all eager to shake hands and testify their almost unbounded delight at having their favourite restored to them.

"Ah, Squire," exclaimed Farmer Stiles, "it made my heart nearly jump up into my mouth when John Gubbins brought the news, the next morning, that you were shot and lying at the Priory—it hit me up all of a heap, Squire, and I shook and trembled like an aspen tree. 'Why, maister,' said John, 'what's the matter wi' ye? you do look flabbergasted loike—shakes like old Trooper when he had the staggers.' Sure enough I did stagger more than walk into the house, and swallowing a wine-glass of brandy, rode full split for the Priory, Missus and the servants thinking I were gone clean out of my mind; but at the turn of the lane I nearly unhorsed the doctor, who told me all about it. 'What ails thee, Stiles?' shouted doctor, 'hurrahing and waving thy hat, and frightening my horse into the ditch; drunk or crazy?'—'Neither, doctor,' says I, 'but overjoyed at hearing that the young Squire ain't killed.'"

The news had by this time spread all over the county, being reported in the two opposite papers according to the editor's political opinions. The heading in the tory journal standing thus,

"Daring outrage and attempted abduction of Miss Douglas!" which was modified by the radical organ into, "Failure of a runaway match between Lord V——t and Miss D——s," with comments thereon, insinuating that the young lady had been foiled in her attempted and willing flight with her noble and highly-gifted lover by the intervention of some meddling friends.

Lord Malcolm, on reading the latter paragraph, wrote immediately to the editor, giving him a true statement of the case, and insisting on an immediate contradiction of the untrue and offensive article, which, under the threat of an action for libel, was repudiated as emanating from an anonymous correspondent.

The concourse of horse and footmen drawn together at Bampton on this occasion far exceeded any former gathering—numbers flocking there from curiosity only, to know the true facts of the case; and every sportsman in the neighbourhood deeming it an act of imperative courtesy to father and son on the fortunate termination of the affair. A group of pedestrians also assembled round Mark Rosier, who

detailed the events of that night's adventure, extolling Beauchamp's courage to the skies, telling them how he knocked the big lord twice off his legs like a ninepin.

Whilst Beauchamp was standing talking on the lawn to the gentlemen and farmers, Mrs. Gordon's carriage drove up to the door, with Blanche and Constance, and no sooner did Farmer Stiles recognise the heiress, than raising his hat high in the air, he shouted from his stentorian lungs, "Now, gentlemen, three cheers for Miss Douglas and her happy escape from that villainous Lord!" All hats were off in a moment, and as Blanche stepped from the carriage, a shout, loud, long and hearty, arose, which vibrated through her very heart, and was again and again repeated by the enthusiastic Stiles and his brother farmers; during which Beauchamp made his escape into the house.

"William," exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, "what was the meaning of that terrific shouting on the lawn?"

"The farmers' welcome to dear Blanche on her happy escape. The moment she was recognised, these honest, kind hearted fellows

could not suppress their feelings of delight at her rescue from Lord Vancourt's cowardly attack ; but see, Malcolm is now returning thanks."

Lord Malcolm had just ridden up as the cheers subsided, and learning the cause, spoke thus: "Gentlemen, I thank you all from my heart for your loudly-expressed, and, I am sure, warmly-felt congratulations on my cousin's escape from the dastardly attempt at her abduction by a cowardly and unprincipled scoundrel, which I have no hesitation in pronouncing Lord Vancourt to be" — ("Hear ! hear !" shouted Stiles)—"and I take this opportunity," continued Malcolm, "of stating here publicly, that so far from Miss Douglas being a willing participator in this vile plot (which has been insinuated by a leading radical paper in this county), that she would have preferred death to such a fate ; and for myself, gentlemen, as one of her nearest and dearest relatives, I assert that I would rather have seen her consigned to the grave than married to such a man as Lord Vancourt."

At the termination of this brief harangue, during which a dead silence prevailed, a loud

"hurrah!" again burst forth, amid cries of "shame! shame!"

"Now then," Stiles vociferated, "one cheer more for Lord Malcolm and the young Squire, with long lives and good wives to 'em both!" and another cheer, the strongest and loudest of all, echoed far and wide, making the very armour rattle in the old oak hall.

"Eh! 'pon honour!" exclaimed Captain Markham, who was pouring out some cherry brandy, "those fellows make the very glasses dance on the table. Demmit, Bob, I wish you would stop their brazen throats, we shall have the old building about our ears like the walls of Jericho."

"Hah! hah! not bad for you, Markham," said Conyers; "but these fellows are intent on propping up, not pulling down, the House of Beauchamp; let them cheer on, and I only hope the sound of their sweet voices may be borne on the breeze to Marston Castle."

Whilst the old Squire and Bob Conyers were doing the honours at the breakfast table to a large party of visitors, Mark, with the underlings about the place, was occupied in distributing

strong beer and stout to the assemblage on the lawn, making every man who quaffed the contents of the black jack drink to the health of the young Squire.

The drawing-room also was filled with ladies who had driven over to see the generally large attendance when the fixture was made for Bampton House, and, on this occasion, many more attended from curiosity, to hear from Will Beauchamp and Constance a true account of Lord Vancourt's attempt on the heiress. As Beauchamp entered the room, Selina Markham rushed forward to seize his hand, exclaiming, "Will, Will, you are not such a sawney as I thought—and so you gave my friend hook-nose a good drubbing, I hear, and split his beautiful beak for him? — this is charming news, 'pon honour!—but eh! aw! the thief has paled your face, Will Beauchamp—this is as bad as a fall over a five-barred gate, with a broken rib."

"Not quite, Selina, I shall be all right again in a few days."

"Mind you are, Master Will, as we are to have a hop next week to a fiddle and flute, and

I shall parade you on that night as the champion of the Light Weights.—Ned says you are a demmed plucky young fellow, and ought to be in the Life Guards."

"Much obliged for the compliment, Selina; although in time of peace, a fox-hunter's life is more exciting and perilous than a soldier's."

The hounds now appeared, and were looking eagerly about, in expectation of seeing their young master. "Oh, what a beautiful sight," exclaimed Blanche, who was standing with Mrs. Gordon and Beauchamp at one of the windows, "what handsome dogs!"

"Would you like to have them at the window, dear Blanche?" whispered Beauchamp.

"Oh, yes, William, pray let them come!"

The window was raised directly, and at their Master's call, the whole pack rushed to his summons, jumping up, and licking his hand in exuberant delight, and ready to devour him with caresses.

"How those faithful hounds must love you, William," murmured Blanche, as she leaned out to pat their honest heads.

"Yes, dear girl, there is no flattery in their

professions, but genuine true affection; and now, as the gentlemen are all ready, I must close the window, and you will see them walk reluctantly away with the whipper-in, casting many a long and lingering look behind."

The appearance of Beauchamp with Miss Douglas, patting and fondling the hounds together, could not fail to attract all eyes towards them; and many and sincere were the aspirations breathed by their true friends, the farmers especially, for the future happiness of the pair, who appeared formed for each other.

"Ah," muttered Stiles to young Hazel, as they rode away, "what a sweet-tempered, beautiful young lady Miss Blanche is, and I'll warrant the Squire loves her as the apple of his eye—how happy they both looked! blessings on 'em both, say I, and may they soon become man and wife."

The company had now taken their leave, as the hounds disappeared from the scene, and Beauchamp remained with Mrs. Gordon and Blanche, Constance having galloped off with Malcolm and Conyers, promising, however, to return early.

"Well, dear aunt," said Beauchamp, "your presence at our home meet was quite an unexpected honour, and to me a most delightful surprise."

"Why, William, to tell you the truth, I rather suspected the temptation would be too great, and feared you would be rash enough to join the hounds, unless myself and Blanche drove over in time to prevent you; and another reason was, that if you were a good boy, and kept your promise, I would reward you for your dutiful conduct, by spending the day with you; —there, William, was not that very good and considerate in me?"

"Yes, dear aunt, as you ever are to one who does not deserve half your kindness."

"Of that, I suppose I may be the best judge, Mr. William; and now, having breakfasted very early on your account, I and Blanche shall not object to another cup of tea or coffee, and a slice of cold fowl, if there is such a thing left in the breakfast room;" to which they immediately repaired, but found few eatables remaining, except part of a cold round of spiced beef and a knuckle of ham, which had still

held out against the repeated attacks of the hungry fox-hunters; all the more delicate viands having entirely vanished. Ringing the bell, the old butler appeared, when Beauchamp enquired if there was any cold fowl or game left in the house, desiring him to bring in also some fresh tea for the ladies.

"I think, sir," said the old man, "we can find something the ladies would like quite as well as cold fowl, if they can wait a short time." Accordingly, in about twenty minutes the butler reappeared, with a brace of grilled partridges, split down the back, and a few small cakes of a peculiar sausage prepared at Bampton House.

"There, aunt," said Beauchamp, "is a sportsman's breakfast for you and Blanche, to which I hope you will do justice."

"Really, William, it looks very inviting, and I never saw game sent up to table in that fashion before."

"It is one of our old fashions, aunt, and a much quicker way of dressing game or poultry than roasting, and in my opinion the flavour is far superior."

The merits of the dish were tested, and ap-

proved of by both the ladies, who pronounced it a decided improvement over the usual mode of cooking; and after breakfast, Mrs. Gordon having left the room for a few moments, Beauchamp, taking Blanche's hand, said, "I think, dear girl, after what has passed between us, it is a duty I owe our true kind friend, aunt Gordon, to make her acquainted with our mutual love, and ask her approval of my addresses (I will not now say engagement) to her dearly-prized niece."

"Yes, dear William," replied Blanche, blushing, and with her hand trembling in his; "I wish no concealments from my affectionate aunt, and have felt rather uncomfortable sometimes in her presence since we last parted, because I feared you might not approve my telling her."

"Thank you, my own dear love," replied Beauchamp, raising her hand to his lips; "but, dear, dear Blanche, how you tremble. Love me! oh, still love me as a brother! if you fear me as a lover."

"I do not fear you, dear William," raising her eyes timidly to his, "but I have become so nervous lately, you must not regard it."

Her hand was still retained in his as Mrs. Gordon returned to the room, when Beauchamp turning to her, said,—"Dear aunt, I have been bold enough to confess my long ardent attachment to dear Blanche, which only wants your approval, to make me the most envied as well as the most happy of men; do I presume too much in hoping you will not withhold your kind consent?"

"Indeed, Mr. William! I scarcely know what to say, as I suspect this confession—to Blanche has been made long ago; and I think you have not treated me well—in these concealments from one who has always regarded you, hitherto, as her own son."

"Indeed, indeed, dearest aunt, I have had no opportunity of making this disclosure to you before, without writing a formal proposal, which I felt rather reluctant to do; but will you forgive this little omission, as I never intended to keep back anything from you, who have been to me as a second mother?"

"Well, poor fellow! you have suffered too much pain lately, for me to inflict more—and now, dear Blanche, if you do really love this way-

ward, worthless boy, I shall not add to *your* nervousness either by withholding my approval of your choice,—so come here, both of you;" when, joining their hands together, Mrs. Gordon, in the most affectionate and impressive manner, invoked a blessing on their union, and, overcome by her own as well as Blanche's emotion, hastily left them together, telling them they would find her in the drawing-room. In half-an-hour they rejoined her, when Beauchamp told her, as Blanche was still so young, he did not wish her to be bound by any formal engagement to himself thus early, especially as she was to be presented at court in the spring, and make her *début* in the London fashionable circles.

"That entirely depends upon Blanche's own feelings," replied Mrs. Gordon; "but, were I in her place, William, I would not afford you even this little loop-hole for escape; *you* want, I suppose, sir, to have a season in town, too, and if you meet with a prettier girl than Blanche, intend to put her aside."

"Dear, dear aunt!" exclaimed Beauchamp, "how can you utter such a libel on my constancy and devotion to her I prefer above all the treasures on earth?"

"Then what do you mean, you silly boy?"

"I do not wish our attachment to each other to be made public at present, or any engagement, on Blanche's part, to exist, although I hold myself firmly and irrevocably bound to her: but if, at the end of the London season, she still prefers me to any other, I will then claim her hand, on the condition that her whole fortune shall be settled upon herself."

"Really, William, you are so ridiculously romantic, and particular also, I shall advise Blanche to give you up altogether."

"Indeed, aunt, I only urge this from my deep love to her, and the fear that she may be too hastily committed under her present excited feelings."

"Well, then, you and Blanche must settle these childish objections between yourselves; and when you have made up your minds whether you are really in love or not, let me know. For the present I shall say nothing to any other person on the subject, not even to Malcolm and Constance, who would only laugh at your folly; but bear in mind, you have both my free consent to marry when you please; and under present

circumstances, I do not consider it necessary to consult Mr. Harcourt. There—that will do; so now be off and take a short walk, while I finish writing my letters; but remember, William must not go very far."

On their return, Mrs. Gordon asked if they had made up their first quarrel. "Nearly, if not quite, dear aunt; although Blanche was very indignant at being considered either so childish or so fickle as not to know her own mind; but as she would not consent either to marry or run away with me before this day week, the matter remains in abeyance. Still, on one point we are agreed, that it will be more prudent to make an effort to obtain Mr. Harcourt's approbation before our engagement is made known to any other person, or he might consider such an act, before consulting him, a most serious and unpardonable offence."

"Well, William, I think you are quite right in that view of the case; but, until this unfortunate trial is past, any application to Mr. Harcourt would be perfectly fruitless on your part, and in the mean time I will endeavour to smooth the way, and call at Throseby; as it is far better for

us all to keep on good terms with the Harcourts, if possible."

The morning passed rapidly away to the two lovers, and Blanche discarding further reserve, her usual cheerful buoyancy of spirits once more gladdened the heart of William Beauchamp, and her light, playful laugh rang through the old Hall, where she was engaged at a game of billiards with him when Lord Malcolm and Constance returned.

"Ah, my pet," exclaimed her cousin, "so this is the way you have been killing time, which, of course, has passed very heavily since we left you; but I need not ask who wins?"

"And why not, Charles?"

"Because, you are as two to one against Beauchamp; and can at any time win more games with your eyes, dear girl, than ever you will with your hands."

"Well, Charles, since no spell of that kind will influence you, I challenge you to a game when this is finished."

"Not now, Blanche, as I must play first with my knife and fork, and tell Will all about our day's sport."

" You will find luncheon on the table," said Beauchamp, "and I will join you in a few minutes; but I wish you would persuade Mrs. Gordon to dine here; the moon rises early, and there is no fear of robbers."

" With all my heart," said Malcolm, as he turned into the drawing-room first; when, having overcome Mrs. Gordon's objections, he returned, saying he would send back his hunter to the Priory, and go home in the carriage with the ladies. " Is not this a delightful arrangement, Blanche ?"

" Oh, yes, Charles, I am so happy you have prevailed on aunt to stay and dine here."

" Well, then, after I have had some luncheon, I will accept your challenge at the billiard table, and leave the fox-hunting story for Bob Conyers to relate over his wine."

Being rather disgusted with Charley's performances as huntsman, that individual returned with the old squire about five o'clock, and at half-past six this sociable, happy little party sat down to their dinner, which was discussed with great gusto and high glee; the old Squire keeping his guests alive with merriment and good humour.

"Well, Blanche," said he, "it makes my old heart glad to see your sweet, cheerful smile once more, and the colour again in your cheeks. Poor child! you had a narrow escape, and Will too; but there, I see it is a sore subject still, so we will say no more about it—but have a glass of wine together instead; fill her a bumper, Will, and here"—raising his own glass—"is long life and happiness to you, my dear girl, and confusion to all your enemies;" and the contents instantly disappeared. "Come, Blanche," observing her sipping her wine, "don't make two bites at a cherry—off with it, child—a bottle of this sort would do you no harm. Don't look at aunt Gordon, you are not under petticoat government here; and now, Malcolm, fill your aunt's glass, as her turn comes next."

"It's no use trying to refuse," said Malcolm, as she withdrew her glass, "the governor will have his own way at Bampton."

"Oh, I see," said the Squire; "Mrs. Gordon likes something lighter—champagne or burgundy—which shall it be?"

"Neither for me, Mr. Beauchamp, as I have taken enough already."

"Pooh! pooh! you shall taste both. Thomas, a bottle of champagne and one of burgundy; and mind the cork is sound."

"Yes, sir," as the old butler toddled out of the room.

"That's right, Squire!" exclaimed Conyers; "ladies never refuse champagne, and I am just in the humour for a glass or two myself."

"Really, Mr. Conyers, you seem to have joined in a conspiracy to make us all tipsy to-night," replied Mrs. Gordon.

"Oh, no, my dear madam, we only wish to make your eyes and dear Blanche's sparkle a little more brilliantly."

"Now, Mrs. Gordon," said Mr. Beauchamp, as Thomas appeared with two long-necked bottles, "which first, champagne or burgundy?"

"Champagne, if I must take any;" and immediately a tall glass sparkled by the side of each lady, which in courtesy could not be refused.

"We shall do now," said the old Squire, "and the ladies shall not be obliged by me to take any more than one glass of burgundy after dinner."

When the ladies were rising from the table, Mrs. Gordon said, "Malcolm, you must not be late to-night, as I have once or twice observed, in our drives, a tall, stout man on horseback loitering behind the carriage, which makes me feel rather nervous." A quiet smile passed over William Beauchamp's features as she said this, which Blanche noticing, asked in a low tone if he knew who this person was.

"Yes, my dear girl," as he rose to open the door, and stood with her for a moment outside, "you need not feel alarmed; it is Mark Rosier, who is your guard day and night wherever you go."

"Oh, dear William," she said, putting her hand in his, "how kind and considerate thus to watch over me."

"Mark is only my substitute whilst I am disabled, and when able I shall guard you myself."

"No, dear William, that you must not do; I never can repay you for all your anxiety and trouble about me."

"You can guess the reward, dear girl, which will more than repay me."

"I am all your own now, William," she said,

blushing, "and therefore I suppose you will claim it, whether I like to give it or not;" and he folded her in his arms, saying, "My own dearest treasure! how undeserving am I of such a blessing as your love!"

"Dear William, you deserve more than I can give; but now let me go."

"Tell aunt Gordon and Constance, then, if you like, about Mark Rosier, but no one else."

As she tripped after her friends into the drawing-room, Mrs. Gordon asked the cause of her detention by Beauchamp, which was explained by Blanche telling her the name of the dark man who had been noticed following the carriage.

"Just like my dear brother," exclaimed Constance, "ever too anxious about those he loves. Ah, Blanche, you will have a sad time of it when you are married—he will never let you out of his sight except on hunting days, when you may have the opportunity of a little quiet flirtation with others, but rest assured he will never let you go alone to any dinner-party or ball; in fact, my dear girl, my only fear is that you may have too much of his agreeable company."

"Of that *I* have no fear, dear Constance, for I could not be happy anywhere without him."

"Well, dear, I have hitherto refrained from saying much in William's favour, lest you might think me an interested person and endeavouring to prejudice you; but now you have acted from the impulse of your own heart in accepting and returning his love, I may tell you that I do not believe it possible you could have selected one who will make you so thoroughly happy as my own dear brother."

"In which I perfectly agree," added Mrs. Gordon; "but William is so romantic, Constance, as to insist on Blanche having the pick of the London fashionables before she is finally engaged to him. What would you say to Malcolm's making a similar proposal to you?"

"That I should not feel very much flattered by such a want of confidence in my affection; but William, I am quite certain, can have only one motive; and as Blanche has seen so little of the world, I rather think he is pursuing the most honourable course, and exhibiting a self-denial which very few men, if any, would practise under similar circumstances, knowing that

the issue of this trial must be life or death to his hopes of happiness."

"Dear Constance," said Blanche, throwing her arms round her neck, "I am quite vexed, and almost angry, with William for entertaining such doubts of my constancy, and have told him I never will agree to such humiliating terms. I am his now and for ever, and your own dear sister, my beloved Constance."

And thus we will leave these two affectionate girls enjoying their rapturous feelings of delight in the contemplation of that nearer tie, which would soon bind them closer than ever to each other.

CHAPTER V.

We must now look into the dining-room, where Conyers was relating the events of the day.

"We have had," said Bob, "very unsatisfactory work. Found, of course, in Parkwood directly, and went away fast for about twenty minutes, when the hounds, coming to a check in a large field stained by a flock of sheep, Charley seized upon them instantly, and thought to make a display of his genius by making a forward cast, taking it for granted the fox had gone straight to the Holt; but the fox, having changed his mind and turned away short to the

left for the furze hills, our run was spoilt. Found again in the furze hills, a thorough good traveller, who went straight through the Holt, and then faced the open for Barton Court coverts, which he skirted, and held on his course over the downs to Staunton village, where we were at fault for the first time among some small enclosures. For fifty minutes the pace had been first-rate, few being able to live with the hounds; and from a shepherd we heard the fox was not half a mile before us, and no doubt lay down somewhere; but Charley, all eagerness, would not give them time, and again made a forward cast through the village towards Staunton Wood, still persisting (notwithstanding my remonstrances) in holding the hounds a good mile in that direction. Whilst occupied in this wild-goose chase, our hunted fox was viewed away from a ditch, where the hounds first threw up, and met by several of the heavy brigade in his way back to Barton Woods. Halloaing and screaming were now the order of the day, in which Charley took the lead, rattling with the hounds full gallop back through the village; but the fox

had made good his retreat, and we soon had two or three fresh ones on foot, when we reached Barton Court, where I left Mr. Charley thoroughly disgusted. 'Holloa!' here; 'tally ho!' there; hounds' heads up, looking about, and wondering what it all meant;—in short, Will, your old friend Styles remarked, 'It will not do, Mr. Conyers—the pack will be ruined, if the young Squire don't take them in hand again, and that pretty soon——' The fact is, Charley is too much in a hurry, and tries to kill his fox before he is half beaten; and, like many other young huntsmen, depends more upon his own assumed knowledge than the hounds' noses."

"You must remember," said Beauchamp, "it is his first day, and he will improve."

"I don't think it, Will—his ideas are all wrong at present, and he will certainly spoil the hounds by trying to ride away from the field, which appears to be his chief consideration;—the more haste the less speed; and a thorough good huntsman, however quick, ought never to be in a hurry. It is the same with hounds—a *fast* and a *quick* hound are very distinct ani-

mals; and a *harey starey* fellow, who, as Beckford says, would ride over a church if it came in his way, is generally the reverse of quick."

"Well, Bob, I hope to be in the saddle again the beginning of next week; and now, as I know Mrs. Gordon will be in a fidget about leaving, we must cut short our discussion about the merits of hounds and huntsmen—what say you, Malcolm?"

"Always as ready to attend the ladies, my dear fellow, as yourself,—so come along."

"Well, aunt," said he, as they entered the drawing-room, "don't you think me a very good, obedient nephew, to break up our after-dinner sitting so early?"

"Yes, Charles, you have behaved very well indeed to-night."

"Ah, very little merit is due to me, for Will Beauchamp, being restricted from wine, hurried us off before our second bottle was finished, for which Conyers and myself voted him a confounded bore, and a very selfish fellow to boot; so now, to be revenged, I shall make Constance and Blanche sing till midnight."

"Indeed, Charles, you will do no such thing;

I shall order the carriage in half an hour, as after what has happened, I feel very nervous in being out late; but if Mr. Beauchamp and William will dine with us on Monday next, by which time I hope he will be nearly recovered, you shall sit up till two in the morning, if you like."

"Agreed, aunt; we will have a regular night of it at the Priory on Monday, won't we, Bob?"

"Ay, ay, Malcolm, and raise such a din as to astonish the quiet inmates of that most respectable establishment."

The next morning, Mrs. Gordon, with Blanche, called on the Harcourts, by whom they were received much more graciously than they expected, with many professions of regret for the untoward event which had occurred; but to their proposal of Blanche returning again to Throseby, Mrs. Gordon decidedly objected. "Poor girl!" she said, "she has not yet recovered the shock of that night, and never moves out in the carriage, or on foot, without a guard to protect her from further outrage."

"Surely there can be necessity for such supervision," replied Mrs. Harcourt, "as it is

reported Lord Vancourt was seriously wounded, and therefore must be unable to renew the attempt, even were he so disposed, which I think highly improbable."

"We have very good authority for believing Lord Mervyn was equally concerned in the plot," replied Mrs. Gordon; "and it is not improbable that other agents may be employed to carry out the designs of these honourable noblemen, who are a disgrace to the peerage."

"I have been assured by Lord Mervyn," said Mrs. Harcourt, "to whom I wrote for an explanation, "that his men were employed by Lord Vancourt without his knowledge."

"Which we can prove," retorted Mrs. Gordon, "is a great falsehood, as my Lord Mervyn was himself the originator and concocter of this disgraceful scheme, and Lord Vancourt a too willing tool in his hands; that's what we know, Mr. Harcourt, and are prepared to prove at the trial; and it is infamous that a married man like Lord Mervyn, with children, should have entered into such a vile conspiracy to ruin a poor defenceless girl. We know all about it, Mr. Harcourt, and that this Lord Vancourt

was invited down to the Castle for the express purpose of carrying off your ward, and that Lord Mervyn knew him to be a poor, good-for-nothing, fortune-hunting rake about town. The whole thing was planned by Lord Mervyn, and Mr. Harley (whom you will remember meeting at the Castle, and who was purposely instructed to laud this Lord Vancourt, and represent him as a person of high character and large fortune;) these two, with that worthy person, Richard Vernon, arranged the whole proceedings; and as all this will come out upon the trial, Mr. Harcourt,—if you have any regard for your own position in the county, my advice to you is, to avoid further intimacy with the contemptible owner of Marston Castle."

"Indeed, Mrs. Gordon, I am perfectly astonished at your account of this matter, but still think you must be in error as to Lord Mervyn having so grossly committed himself."

"*You* are in error, Mr. Harcourt, *I* am not," replied Mrs. Gordon, as she rose to take her leave; "but I hope we shall see you on Monday at the Priory, where I have asked a few friends in the evening."

The invitation being accepted was considered as the outward adjustment of any personal differences between the two aunts, although their inward feelings remained in *statu quo*. In direct refutation of the scandalous reports spread by Lord Mervyn and his partisans, Mrs. Gordon determined, therefore, on giving as large a party as her house could contain, with a dance afterwards, as a testimony of rejoicing for Blanche's happy escape, and the invitations to her neighbours, Lady Markham, Mrs. Rolleston, Mrs. Compton, and others, were expressive of her feelings on this point. The Beauchamps, with Conyers, were her only guests at the dinner-table; but a splendid supper was provided for the other company, who began to arrive about half-past nine, Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt being almost the first to make their appearance, and constrained therefore to listen to the felicitations offered to Mrs. Gordon and her niece.

"Ah, my dear girl!" said Selina Markham, kissing Blanche, "so this is an ovation for your escape from Hooknose, Mervyn, and Co.?"

"Hush, Selina!"

"I shall not be hushed, poor child, from expressing my congratulations, and only regret Mark did not send a ball through that coachman's leg, to prevent his running away. But how fares our champion, Will Beauchamp? I intend heading a subscription to present him with a piece of plate, in token of his gallant conduct in defending the 'rights of women to choose their own husbands.' What will you give, Blanche? or"—(sinking her voice to a whisper)—"do you purpose rewarding him in another way?"

"Oh, nonsense, Selina, how foolish you talk to-night!"

"*I* should not call it foolish, child, to reward *my* preserver with something more substantial than gold and silver, and I rather suspect, from those tell-tale eyes, Blanche Douglas is of the same opinion; but as the subject *appears so disagreeable,* let us talk of something else—this grand hunt ball, which is now fixed to take place on the fourteenth of next month, St. Valentine's day. That is to be a splendid affair, as all are requested to appear in characters or fancy dresses. What is yours to be, Blanche?"

"I really have not thought much about it yet, Selina: but here comes your brother."

"Eh—Miss Douglas—glad to see you looking so bewitching to-night. 'Pon honour, roses all returned—frightened enough, I dare say, at first; demmed disagreeable affair—lucky it's no worse—journey to Scotland no joke at this time of year—*nolens volens*, and all that sort of thing. But Dick did the thing cleverly—all *volens* in his case. Demmit! how old Mervyn stormed and raved!—Cracked, they say, ever since. Lost five hundred pounds as well as his daughter—served the old villain right—regularly floored—wish he'd been shot instead of Will Beauchamp. Poor fellow! looks very white about the gills still."

"There, Ned, that will do," said his sister; "we have heard enough of that story."

"Then, Miss Douglas, may I have the honour—first quadrille, or second, eh?"

"Neither," replied Blanche, laughing, "but the fourth, if you particularly desire it."

"Thank you, Miss Douglas, feel greatly honoured, and all that sort of thing," with which the Captain walked off.

" Ned is not such a very bad sort of fellow, after all," remarked Selina, " although, I must confess ! an egregious fool in some respects ; but he knows what is due to our sex, and has very honourable, upright feelings, and, I believe, nothing would induce him to do a mean or cowardly action."

" I assure you, Selina, I entertain the same opinion of your brother ; and am always glad to dance with him when I can, as he is ever most gentlemanly and kind in his manner, and the very reverse of Richard Vernon."

" Well, there is one comfort, Blanche, we shall never be troubled with that cur again ; but what a fate for that poor girl, to be linked for life to such a man ! What fools girls are to be taken by handsome-looking men, who have no other recommendation ; I had rather marry the ugliest man, with a good heart and disposition, than the veriest Adonis without these qualities, and it is far better to learn to love a plain man for his virtues, than to be obliged to dislike a handsome one for his vices, after marriage ; but a truce to our moralizing, as the fiddles are tuning, and, I suppose, Will Beauchamp, having

dined here, has engaged you for the first dance;" which coming to claim, Beauchamp approached and asked Selina for the second.

"I scarcely know whether I shall honour you or not, for, as Ned says, you still look very seedy and white about the gills, and I don't consider hopping and jumping about likely to improve your health."

"Sauntering quietly through the figure will do me no harm, Selina."

"Well, then, I will take you under my sage care, Mr. Will, to prevent your falling into worse hands."

On accepting Beauchamp's arm, Blanche said, anxiously, "I fear you are acting very imprudently in dancing to-night, William."

"No, dear Blanche, a little exercise will do me good now; but I shall not exceed two or three dances, and then sit down to criticise the performance of others, and make all kinds of ill-natured speeches, as some people will of me to-night."

"Who do you mean, dear William?"

"The Throseby Hall lady looks daggers at me, and I verily believe, in her heart, would rather

have seen you in the power of that villain and made wretched for life, than witness your happiness with those you love.

"Indeed, William, I hope not, and trust you are mistaken."

"I am not singular, dear girl, as Bob Conyers also thinks she hates me, cordially, for my interference; but notwithstanding her forbidding looks, she shall receive no incivility from me on your account, although I hope never to see you under her control again."

"Indeed, William, I am so happy with dear aunt Gordon, that I never wish to leave the Priory, where I feel quite at home, which I never did at Throseby."

Blanche's beaming looks and light happy spirits, when dancing with Beauchamp, would have satisfied any but the most determined sceptic that Lord Vancourt was not the object of her choice; and the anxious, thoughtful glance sometimes directed to his face, did not escape the observation of some, who could read the language of love. Captain Melville was one of that number, who, turning to Conyers, said, "My surmises are now confirmed, Bob; Beauchamp

has won the prize, and barring myself of course, there is no man I know more deserving, and whom I would rather see the husband of that sweet girl."

"You are jumping to conclusions in too great a hurry," replied Bob. "She must naturally feel very grateful to Beauchamp for risking his life in her defence; but that impression may be rubbed off by a season in town."

"I think not, Conyers; but, at any rate, I hold my determination of exposing that fellow, Vancourt, and will certainly prevail upon the Italian to give her evidence, if possible. She is passionate and revengeful, as women of her country generally are, and I verily believe, from what she told me, that, had Vancourt succeeded in carrying off and marrying Miss Douglas, she would have followed and stabbed him to the heart."

Under the presidency of Lord Malcolm, who officiated as Master of the Ceremonies, Mrs. Gordon's party passed off most pleasantly, being pronounced by the younger portion of the company the most agreeable and enjoyable *reunion* of the season. All the arrangements were good, the persons invited (with few exceptions) being

well known and on good terms with each other. The little band of music was the best that could be procured; and the refreshments abundant, and of the best description. At the supper-table, champagne circulated most freely; Malcolm and Conyers, acting as toast-masters, at different tables, having resolved that aunt Gordon's guests should have good cause to remember the Priory ball, and her on whose account it had been given.

Sir Lionel Markham and the old Squire kept the game up some time after the ladies quitted the supper table, with their good-humoured and witty remarks. "Now, gentlemen," said Somerville Coventry, rising, "with Lord Malcolm's leave, I will propose two toasts, to which, I believe, all here assembled will heartily respond: 'Health and happiness to our kind hostess, Mrs. Gordon and her fair niece, Miss Douglas, and confusion to the scoundrel who attempted her abduction,'" which was rapturously received, all rising and cheering. When this had subsided, Coventry again rose, observing, "The next toast I have to propose is, 'Fox-hunting, with which I must couple the names of our present high-

spirited young Master, Will Beauchamp, and his worthy father, the old Squire.'"

"That's your sort," vociferated Sir Lucius Gwynne, "trumps, both; fill your glasses, gentlemen, no heel-taps — but bumpers fair— 'The Beauchamps and fox-hunting,'"—and a hearty, hip! hip! hurrah! followed, which echoed through every room in the house. "Well done, my friends," shouted Gwynne, "*floreat scientia, esto perpetua.*"

William Beauchamp returned thanks in a short unpretending speech; thanking Coventry and Sir Lucius for the high compliment paid to his father and himself, and expressing his hopes that "they might always deserve the good opinion of their brother fox-hunters, as well as the gentlemen of the county who did not participate in their sport." This speech was much applauded, and soon after the gentlemen returned to the ball-room; Mr. Harcourt beginning to entertain a more favourable opinion of Beauchamp, from the evident cordiality with which his name was received by so large and respectable a company.

Blanche was sitting with Mrs. Harcourt and

her aunt Gordon, when Captain Markham approaching them, the former enquired the meaning of the shouting at the supper-table, which had almost deafened her.

"Eh! aw! yecas! rather uproarious! bad taste, I dare say. Drank Will Beauchamp's health and fox-hunting — couldn't stop the fellows—would have it—hip! hip! and all that sort of thing. Gwynne said, he was a demmed plucky, high-spirited young fellow, after that little affair of your's, Miss Douglas, on the common;—every body agreed with him—three cheers more, — but didn't forget the ladies—Mrs. Gordon's health drank vociferously. Now, Miss Douglas, — believe I have the honour—next quadrille." With which the Captain walked off with the heiress.

The ball was kept up until three o'clock in the morning, when the company dispersed; Sir Lucius declaring, in fox-hunting parlance, "that Mrs. Gordon's party was *the run of the season.*"

CHAPTER VI.

We must now devote a little space to the fugitives, Lord Vancourt and Vernon. The former dreading pursuit from the determined resolution of Beauchamp, (of whose prowess and courage, from Vernon's sneers, he had formed rather an erroneous opinion, until brought into contact with him), sped on his journey without stopping until he reached London, putting up at an hotel in a retired part of the city, from which he removed the next day, to a lodging near the Regent's Park, which his valet engaged for his master under the assumed name of Captain Hammond, where

he remained until his fractures were sufficiently reduced to enable him to start for the continent.

Vernon, after the ceremony had been performed by the blacksmith, which, according to the laws of Scotland, riveted him to Miss Mervyn, thought it advisable to visit Paris, until Lord Mervyn's anger had cooled down a little. He was lounging one day down the Boulevards, when he met Lord Vancourt, and accosted him as usual, who drawing haughtily up, and refusing his proffered hand, said, "After the dishonourable trick you have served me, Mr. Vernon, I must beg to decline your further acquaintance."

"Pray, explain yourself, my Lord," replied Vernon, "as *I* am the person aggrieved, and your conduct to me in refusing to fulfil your engagement and pledged word of honour, at Marston Castle, is a much more dishonourable transaction than any I can have committed against your lordship."

"My meaning, sir, is very plain; by forestalling the horses I had ordered, and assuming the same name I had taken, you would have left me at the mercy of my pursuers."

"As you would have left me, my Lord, by

not paying down the sum you promised, and on which I fully depended, to prosecute my journey to Scotland, and which, but for unexpected assistance, I had been unable to accomplish; but, as I am informed, a searching investigation is to be made into your Lordship's attempted abduction of Miss Douglas, which has assumed a most serious character, from your violence in shooting Mr. Beauchamp, any little light I may be able to throw on the subject will I doubt not be well received by your opponents, who, by the account transmitted to me, appear determined to prosecute your Lordship to the utmost extremity."

"And could you, Mr. Vernon, calling yourself a gentleman, be guilty of such a mean, contemptible action as to turn evidence against me and your own father-in-law?—there is more honour among thieves, sir."

"Very possibly, my Lord, as thieves generally share the booty obtained by their joint dexterity —*equally*. Your Lordship has failed to practise even their honesty, by keeping back my share of the money you obtained from Lord Mervyn."

"Oh, very well, Mr. Vernon, I will endeavour

then as speedily as possible to discharge my obligations to you."

"The sooner the more acceptable, my Lord, as my finances are in a very low state just now, and my purse requires replenishing; perhaps your Lordship will be good enough to favour me with your present residence, and name what day I may call for an arrangement of this little affair."

"My address is No.—, Rue St. Honoré," giving him his card; "and if you call on me there, at twelve o'clock this day week, we will endeavour to settle our differences, Mr. Vernon;" with which Lord Vancourt pursued his walk, meditating revenge for his late friend's insolence.

Vernon was equally bent on selling Lord Vancourt to the best advantage, unless he fulfilled his contract with him, as from his inability to grasp his unfortunate wife's money so readily as anticipated, he was obliged to resort to his usual method of bringing "grist to his mill," by aid of the dice box and cards. Lord Vancourt, after leaving Vernon, met an old acquaintance in the person of Major Stowell, who had just arrived in Paris, from London. "Ah, Van-

court," exclaimed the Major, "it is yourself, I suppose, although your face is confoundedly altered somehow."

"Got a smash on the nose, old fellow, from being thrown out of my cab three weeks ago."

"Won't do, Vancourt, we heard and read all about your failure with the heiress at the club—long account of it in the Times—I thought it a devilish plucky thing, and sorry you did not succeed. Ten thousand a-year was worth trying hard for—but how was it? we saw two different versions of the affair, one that the lady was willing—the other quite the reverse."

"The truth lies between the two, I believe," replied Lord Vancourt—"she would, and she would not; in fact I was too much in a hurry, and that villain, Richard Vernon, I believe, sold me at last by putting her friends up to my moves, so that just as I was getting her into my own carriage, a lot of fellows bore down upon us,—shot me through the arm, and have nearly, if not quite, killed one of my assistants."

"Devilish awkward business, Vancourt, and I hear Lord Malcolm swears he will transport you, if he can, for this attempt on his cousin."

"That he can't do, Stowell, as I have her guardian's letter, accepting my proposals for his ward, and wishing me success in my addresses."

"Well, that's something in your favour, Vancourt, but, depend upon it, it is a serious matter, and if you will take my advice, don't show your face in England until the trial is over."

"The man I dread most of all," replied Lord Vancourt, "is Richard Vernon, who was staying with me at Marston Castle, and helped to plan the whole thing from beginning to end; and he declares, unless I pay him two hundred and fifty pounds, as hush money, on this day week, he will give Lord Malcolm a full account of the plot."

"Why, I met Vernon two nights ago at a gambling house, here in Paris, when he won a large sum of money of Count B——, who swore there was foul play on Vernon's part, although unable to detect how; but he is determined to watch him narrowly for the future, and if detected in any tricks, I would not give much for Vernon's life-interest in fifty thousand pounds, the Count being a dead shot. But you had better find the money, Vancourt, and pay

Vernon at once, or the consequences will be serious."

"It is out of my power to make up the sum in so short a time, unless luck favours me at the gaming-table. So what say you to meeting me to-night? and perhaps you will not object to introduce me to Count B——?"

"Oh, most willingly, Vancourt. So now, *au revoir*, as I have a call or two to make."

A thought had suggested itself to Lord Vancourt, that, by an introduction to the Count, he might put him up to Vernon's tricks with dice and cards; and, when detected, a duel would be the inevitable result, in which he hoped to get quit of Vernon's importunities and threats together; believing, from Stowell's account of the Count's character, that nothing would satisfy him short of the death of the man who had already robbed him of so large a sum of money.

Punctual to his appointment, Major Stowell met Lord Vancourt at the gambling house, where he soon had the opportunity of introducing Count B——, who was much pleased with his Lordship's manner and address; and, as both

had travelled a great deal, they were soon engaged in earnest conversation; and from that night became intimate friends. Vernon was there also; but, suspecting Lord Vancourt, he lost instead of winning, his usual run of luck appearing to have deserted him. Lord Vancourt also lost rather a considerable sum to the Count, which, being immediately paid, put him in good humour with his new acquaintance.

The next day Count B—— called on Lord Vancourt, who, after a few common-place observations, alluded to his want of success the previous night.

"Ah! Milor," said the Count, who spoke English very imperfectly, "you lose to me, but your contreman, Monsieur Vernon, play de very devil wid me de other night. Such luck I never see—he win every game, and clear my pocket so"—showing its empty inside.

"Most likely, Count. He is what we call a sharp, keen hand, and up to a trick or two."

"So I tink too, Milor;—but I could not see how de trick was done, which I would give a tousand francs to know."

"Well, Count, I do not want your money;

and, as I consider such tricks downright robbery, I will put you up to them, provided you give me your word of honour never to mention my name."

"My goot Lord, I would not mention your name for de million francs."

Lord Vancourt then told him his suspicions that Vernon carried loaded dice in his sleeve, which, by a sleight of hand, were substituted for those on the board; and these, if marked before they began playing, would, of course, prove the fact."

"Ah! M or, I am so much oblige for de hint."

And he soon after took his leave.

Lord Vancourt, having put things in a train for the destruction, as he hoped, of his former ally, absented himself from the gaming-table, lest he might act as a counterpoise to the exposure, well knowing Vernon's suspicious and subtle disposition.

And, a few nights after, being now sorely pressed for cash, Vernon, in playing with a friend of Count B——'s, again had recourse to his tricks, and was winning largely, when Count

B—— entered the room. Hearing his friend's exclamations of surprise at Vernon's continual success, the Count watched him very intently; and discovering an unusual motion sometimes in his right hand before shaking the dice-box, he walked quickly round the table; and, seizing Vernon's arm, suddenly tore up his sleeve, when four dice instead of two appeared on the board. In a moment, all gathered round the detected man; the Count, livid with passion, abusing him in broken English and German, swearing he would have instant satisfaction for the loss of his money.

Vernon was so thunderstruck at the sudden discovery of his villainy, that he sat as one entranced for a moment, until roused by the insults and abuses poured upon his head, when he rose, and, confronting the Count, accepted his challenge and offered to fight any other man in the room who might feel himself aggrieved.

"Von at a time, sar," replied the Count. "I have de first claim on Monsieur Vernon; and I tink it vara likely he find me von too much; for I will have his life, or he must have mine, before we leave dis house."

The owner of the rooms now interfered, declaring no duel should take place there; an arrangement was therefore made for the hostile meeting in the Bois de Boulogne on the following morning at an early hour, a young Irishman named Fitzgerald, who was slightly known to Vernon, volunteering to act as his second. He made the necessary preparations of pistols and engaged a friend of his own, a native of the Emerald Isle also, then practising as a surgeon in Paris, to attend in case of accident to his principal.

About eight o'clock the next morning, which was dull and gloomy as the thoughts of Vernon, who, from his antagonist's hatred and well-known skill, dreaded a fatal issue to the combat, a carriage containing himself, the surgeon, and Mr. Fitzgerald, drove rapidly up to the appointed place. The Count was on the ground before them, impatient to take vengeance on his adversary; but Fitzgerald, although, like the generality of his countrymen, as ready for a fray as a feast, knowing the Count's deadly aim, felt it incumbent on him to make some show at least of attempting to save the effusion of blood or

loss of life; and accordingly asked the Count's second if a reconciliation could be effected. The offer was received in derision, which roused the Irishman's choler in an instant, who replied:—

"I should ask that for another, sir, which I would not accept for myself; and I wish all here to remember that my overtures for a settlement have been rejected."

"Place your man, sir," was the reply. "We mean fighting, not talking."

Without another word, the ground being measured, the pistols were delivered by their seconds into the hands of the Count and Vernon, who stood fiercely surveying each other, the face of the latter being pale as death; but, knowing his life depended on a steady hand, by a violent effort he stifled every other thought, and awaited the signal. The intense, agonising suspense of such a moment, to a thinking mind, who can describe? Men rush into battle, facing death in every shape, even to the cannon's mouth; balls whistle round their heads, comrades fall beside them, wounded, disfigured, dying, dead; hand to hand, with flashing, bloody sword, the strife continues—no thought of fear or flinching

for a moment crosses the soldier's mind—excited, maddened, he still presses on over heaps of slain. These men are fighting the battles of their country, not their own. They have no private vengeance to gratify, no private wrongs to redress, no fine-spun ideas of honour to maintain; but their war-cry is, "*Pro aris et focis*," for our altars and our homes.

CHAPTER VII.

THE signal was given,—both pistols were discharged simultaneously, making almost one report, and, as the smoke cleared away, Vernon was seen lying on the ground, shot through the body; and the Count staggered back into his second's arms, his opponent's ball having passed through his right shoulder, shattering the bone into splinters. In a moment the surgeon, with Fitzgerald, was kneeling by Vernon's side; the former tearing open his waistcoat, whilst Fitzgerald supported his sinking head upon his knees.

"It's all over with him, Pat," exclaimed the

doctor, "the bullet has passed through his lungs, I fear; but, stay," feeling his pulse, "he lives still, quick with the bottle, pour a little down his throat, if you can, whilst I staunch the blood." A faint sigh escaped the wounded man. "Ah," cried the surgeon, "he revives! give him a little more of the liquid. By the powers! he's coming round; but, poor devil, with that air-hole through his body, recovery, I fear, is hopeless."

The Count's friend, seeing what was taking place, hurried him from the ground, believing Vernon to be mortally wounded, if not already dying; but from the pain and the resuscitating remedies used, the sufferer gradually recovered his consciousness, and begged in a faint voice to be carried home. His next enquiry was about the Count. "You winged him, Vernon," was his friend's reply; "but now, drink the rest of this bottle, and we will try and get you into the carriage, only don't attempt to speak any more just yet, as the doctor won't allow it."

Fitzgerald and his friendly assistant, O'Brien, having carried the wounded man to the carriage, placed him in a recumbent position, and by the

aid of cushions and their over-coats, formed a tolerable couch for him to recline upon; and he was then driven back to his lodgings and placed in bed, Fitzgerald having preceded him and prepared his young and timid wife for the calamity which had befallen her; who, almost frantic with grief and horror, implored to be allowed to see her husband, if only for one moment, to be assured he was not killed. "On my word of honour, my dear young lady," replied the kind-hearted Fitzgerald, taking her hand to prevent her leaving the room, "your husband is not killed, although seriously wounded; and any fresh excitement might be fatal; pray, be guided by me; you shall see him directly the doctor will allow you to do so: but let me entreat you, for his sake, to subdue your feelings as much as possible."

The surgeon, on examining his patient, discovered the ball lodged in his back, just under the skin, and it was, therefore, easily extracted without much more suffering to Vernon's already tortured frame. Soon after his wound was dressed, he fell into a fitful doze; in which state he was left by the doctor, after having

given all necessary directions to his wife's faithful maid how to treat him until his return.

For two days Vernon hovered between life and death, and on the third day, being quite delirious, Fitzgerald called in one of the most eminent physicians in Paris, who pronounced his case almost hopeless. Still no efforts were relaxed to reduce this fevered state of body, and being blessed with a good constitution, the crisis was at last passed, and he began gradually, though slowly, to amend. During this severe trial to his young, affectionate wife, who loved her husband intensely (the only being around whom her young heart had ever been entwined, even from childhood), Fitzgerald, who became deeply interested in her helpless position, was a constant visitor at the house, saying and doing all in his power to alleviate the poignancy of her grief, watching, himself, by her husband's bedside during his delirium, day and night, until he was considered out of immediate danger. Her joy at the prospect of his recovery and gratitude for Fitzgerald's care were almost unbounded; and she would sit for hours together by her husband's bedside, with his

hand in her's, and pour out her thanks for his rescue from a violent death. Even Vernon's stern, unfeeling nature gave way before the deep affection shown by this young, artless girl, whom he had seduced from her father's roof, more from a love of her money than any other feeling; but now, sobered down by the sufferings he had undergone, his heart responded to her fervent, deep attachment. "Oh! Emily," he would exclaim, "I am, indeed, unworthy your love and anxious care; but should my life be spared, I will endeavour to make some amends for the injury I have done you, in taking you from all your friends to link your fate with such a monster as myself."

"Oh, speak not thus, dearest Richard, you are all, every thing to me; my father and mother have never loved me as you do."

"Well, poor child, I must try hard to recover now for your dear sake, and repay you for all your gentle, loving attentions." Vernon was soothed and gratified by her unceasing attendance and endearing regard to every little comfort t was in her power to bestow, which greatly tended to his recovery, and he was soon permitted

to sit up in his easy chair for a few hours during the day. Lord Vancourt, being apprised of the issue of the duel, called several times at Vernon's lodgings; and having on the third day met the doctors there and been told that his case was hopeless, he immediately left Paris, dreading to be implicated in the affair, which was communicated to Vernon by Fitzgerald; and also that he had learnt from the Count's friend some additional information as to Lord Vancourt's putting the Count up to his tricks at play and inciting him to challenge Vernon. Fitzgerald also hinted at the necessity of Vernon's applying to his friends for pecuniary assistance, as the tradesmen with whom he dealt, on hearing the cause of the duel, had refused to supply more goods, and were clamorous for their little accounts being settled. "I have done as much as I can to assist you, Mr. Vernon," added Fitzgerald, "more, I must confess, out of regard to your wife's wretched position; but now, as you are so far recovered, your own exertions are absolutely necessary to prevent her being left in a state of utter destitution; as, unknown to you, she wrote to her mother for pity and aid in her

forlorn situation, to which no answer has been received."

Vernon, feeling grateful for Fitzgerald's kindness, made a full confession of his past delinquencies and Lord Vancourt's refusal to pay the money he promised for his assistance in the plot to carry off the heiress.

"It was a rascally business, Mr. Vernon," replied Fitzgerald; "and I must say you have only reaped your deserts for aiding to ruin a young defenceless girl by throwing her into the power of such a scoundrel, who, by your own account, is suspected to be a married man. Even an Irishman, sir, wild and impetuous as we are, would never have been guilty of such an act as this."

"Well, then," said Vernon, "I will write to Lord Malcolm, and offer to give him every information about Lord Vancourt, on condition of his sending me a draft on some banker in Paris for two hundred pounds."

"Then, Mr. Vernon," said Fitzgerald, "I must beg, for the future, we may be strangers to each other, as we were before this unhappy affair."

"Stay, Fitzgerald, tell me what you would have me do, for I am indeed most grateful for all your undeserved kindness."

"Sign the letter I shall dictate, containing a full confession of your sorrow and contrition for your unmanly conduct, with all you know of Lord Vancourt and his proceedings, and the promise that you will give evidence, if required, at the trial, without any reservation or stipulation whatever. This, sir, is the course which any man, pretending to the name and character of a gentleman, would without hesitation pursue, and I shall add a postscript informing Lord Malcolm of your condition, and your wife's unfortunate and destitute state."

"It shall be done," said Vernon, without hesitation.

Fitzgerald then resumed his seat, and wrote from Vernon's mouth all the particulars, to which his own name and that of the servant-girl were attached as witnesses.

"Very well, Vernon, that is a step in th right direction, and I trust the severe lesson you have received will prevent you ever again using false dice or conniving at the abduction of an

inoffensive girl. You have now a young wife dependent on your rectitude of conduct, unless you would also consign her to misery and disgrace; throughout your severe sufferings this poor girl has watched and tended you, night and day, with all the care and anxiety of a ministering angel, and for her sake I implore you to lead a new life."

"I know and feel it all, Fitzgerald, and, for her sake, I now swear never to touch dice or cards again."

"Keep to your good resolution, Vernon; we may then still be friends, and you may rely on my assisting you in every way I can—now no more—I will post the letter and see you again in the morning."

A few days afterwards a letter was received from Lord Malcolm, expressing his sorrow for Vernon's deplorable situation, with a draft on his bankers in London for a hundred pounds, and by the same post a few lines from Will Beauchamp, enclosing a note for fifty pounds, which ran thus:—

"VERNON,

"I heartily forgive your ill-founded

hatred towards myself, for which I never could assign a cause, and trust you may return to this country a happier and better man. Accept this trifle from yours truly,

"WILLIAM BEAUCHAMP."

"There, Fitzgerald," said Vernon, handing him Beauchamp's letter, "that hurts and cuts me to the quick—that man I have injured, traduced, and vilified more than all, and it was from hatred to him that I joined in this infernal plot to give Miss Douglas into Vancourt's power, fearing she loved Beauchamp; envy and jealousy led me on, as I once tried hard to gain her myself."

"Well, Vernon, this is a pretty confession; but now, what are your present feelings towards him?"

"All that I can do to help his cause and Malcolm's shall be done."

"That's right, Vernon; you have been tramping long enough and too long to the tune of the 'Rogues' March,' and I hope you now see that 'Honesty is the best Policy.'"

Relieved of a load of care by these timely and

unexpected remittances, Vernon felt more at ease, and next addressed a very penitential letter to Lord Mervyn, pleading his affection for his daughter as an excuse for his conduct in carrying her off; depicting in glowing colours her incessant care and anxiety about him when at the point of death, and expressing his resolution to lead a new life and devote all his energies to make her happy. He also stated that, to atone for his past conduct, he had made a confession to Lord Malcolm of his participation with Lord Vancourt in the plot to carry off Miss Douglas, without, however, revealing other names, as he had been most inhumanly treated by his Lordship, who had conspired against his life and left him almost dying in Paris without a shilling. On the receipt of this letter from his worthy son-in-law, Lord Mervyn became seriously alarmed, and fearing Vernon's vindictive character, thought he would be safer under his own eye than exposed to that of the opposing party; he therefore enclosed him a handsome sum of money to defray his travelling expenses when able to move, with an invitation to Marston Castle.

CHAPTER VIII.

We must now cross the channel to see what was occurring in the vicinity of Bampton. John Carter, Lord Mervyn's footman, feeling uncomfortable in his situation as a suspected man, gave notice to leave, and Mark Rosier having mentioned this to Lord Malcolm, he was at once engaged by him, Mrs. Gordon willingly agreeing to receive him at the Priory until Malcolm's return to Scotland.

Lord Mervyn had invited as large a party of the neighbouring gentry as he could muster to a grand battue at the close of the shooting season, in which hundreds of pheasants and

hares fell, the majority of which were packed off to the London markets.

William Beauchamp had assumed the reins of government over the pack, which was the reverse of being improved by Charles's mal-administration, who had only succeeded in bringing home the head of one fox after a fortnight's hunting, and, sooth to say, Charley himself was nothing loth to fall back into his old place of whipper-in. What with trying to ride or scream foxes to death (notwithstanding which they could not be prevailed on, like Mrs. Bond's ducks, to come to be killed), the hounds' heads had got up to such an alarming height that Will Beauchamp found great difficulty in bringing down their high-wrought expectations to their proper level again, and he experienced almost as much trouble to reduce his field to their usual good order, the majority of the youngsters having, during the master's absence, considered themselves privileged to enact the part of huntsmen or whippers-in whenever they could get away from the old Squire or Bob Conyers. If there were half-a-dozen foxes on foot in one covert, every one was vociferously cheered by the party

who chanced to view his particular favourite across the drive, although the hounds might be running another in the very opposite direction; so pleased had some of these amateur huntsmen become with the sound of their own sweet voices, that the master was treated to such a concert of discordant halloes in all directions on his first appearance at the Barton woods (where several foxes were on foot), that he sat for a few seconds in amazement, wondering to what extent this might lead; then putting spurs to his horse, and blowing his horn, he got the hounds together, and took them away from the covert to a large field, where he drew up and waited until he was surrounded by the greater portion of his followers.

"Now, gentlemen," exclaimed Beauchamp, addressing them in a loud voice, "as it is very evident that there are several persons out to-day who consider themselves more competent to hunt the hounds than myself, I shall be obliged by your informing me who is to be huntsman, that I may at once resign the horn to that individual, it being necessary, to prevent further confusion, that one man alone should act in that capacity."

The would-be huntsmen looked extremely foolish at this address; but no answer being returned, Beauchamp sat quietly on his horse, as if awaiting their reply.

"Come, come, Beauchamp," cried Sir Lucius, "don't mind those confounded fools' hallooing; but let us have a run this cold, shivery day."

"As you please, Gwynne, but I wish it to be clearly understood that, if I am to be huntsman, the first halloa I hear shall be the last this day, for I will immediately take the hounds home, which are already spoilt so much by this babel of tongues, that they won't even try to hunt a fox."

"Quite right," exclaimed Conyers and Coventry, "it is the only thing you can do to stop all this riot."

"Very well, gentlemen," said Beauchamp, "as you now know the terms, I will also try to get on terms again with my fox; and, Charles, I will thank you to bear in mind that you are now whipper-in."

"Yes, sir," said Charley touching his cap very submissively.

"Ah, Mr. Conyers," exclaimed farmer

Styles, "that's just what they all wanted, a bit of a lecture from the young Squire; things will go on comfortable again after this."

On holding the hounds round the lower side of the covert, they struck upon the line of a fox which had gone away some ten or twelve minutes in the direction of Hazel Wood, about four miles distant, which Beauchamp, to punish his field as well as sober his hounds, made them hunt inch by inch; this produced the desired effect, as both men and hounds perceived their huntsman's determination to admit of no interference.

The fox, never having been pressed, jogged leisurely along, the pack improving in their pace until they reached Hazel Wood, where he had lingered for some time, enabling the hounds to get on better terms, when he broke, going straight for the forest six miles a-head.

"Now then," shouted Bob Conyers, as he caught sight of the pack streaming away, "come on, you thrusting scoundrels,—now's your time—let 'em go—no more hold hards to day;" and down rattled the rst division of light cavalry, charging their fences with long pent-up

impatience. The hounds, however, having got the start, seemed resolved to keep it, and the brook being brim full and over after a heavy night's rain, the casualties which occurred there were rather more numerous than usual, there being *multi*, instead of "*rari nantes in gurgite vasto*," few who rode at it escaping without a ducking. The Captain and Coventry took their plunge as usual; some rode at it fast, others walked their horses into the stream, the banks of which could not be discerned; but all landed safely on the other side and again set to work to catch the hounds, which few were destined to see any more that day. The forest was reached; but the fox, disdaining its protection, passed through one corner of it, and boldly faced the open, into the neighbouring hunt, taking their huntsman entirely out of his reckoning, as to the point he contemplated reaching, and everything now depending on the staunchness of the pack.

Will Beauchamp interfered as little as possible in two or three checks which occurred, and five or six miles of new country had now been crossed at a good hunting pace after leaving the forest.

"Where," exclaimed Conyers, "can the fox be travelling to, Will? he must be out of his latitude as well as ourselves; although as to longitude, confound him! he still seems holding on straight enough."

"He has run me out of my geography, Bob; although there is, I believe, a strong covert somewhere in the direction he is now going, belonging to the H—— Hunt, which I conclude is his point."

"Ah! well, this proves what a good fox can do, when he has a fair start and is not hurried over the first five miles. Your bursts of twenty or thirty minutes are all very well sometimes, but give me a good hunting run like this; look, there is a likely covert, just a few fields ahead—please the pigs, we don't change there."

"No, no, we shall book him yet. Now, Charley, to the further end of it, and mind you don't halloa a fresh fox."

Here the hounds, for the first time, got up with their game, and gave him such a rattling, that he broke away again, running for some open downs above the vale. For two miles the pace was terrific; the hounds with heads up,

and sterns down, running hard for their game, which they knew must be sinking, and on ascending the hill side, he was viewed, not a hundred yards before the leading couples, and in a few seconds both disappeared over the brow of the hill. Few were there, however, to witness this sight; Will Beauchamp, Conyers, the Whips, Gwynne, and Tyler, with two or three farmers, being all that remained, out of a very large field, to go in and finish. At the foot of the hill, Beauchamp at once dismounted to relieve his horse, which was nearly beaten, leading him up the ascent, his example being followed by all the others, except young farmer Hazel, who still kept spurring his poor jaded animal.

"Come along, Squire," shouted he, "on passing, "I shall be first to see the finish."

"Of your horse, Hazel, in five minutes, unless you jump off his back directly." The words had scarcely passed Beauchamp's lips, before the horse reeled and fell under his rider, who had hardly time to jump from the saddle ere he lay dead before him. "I hope, Hazel," said Beauchamp, "that will be a lesson to you through life, never to ride another willing

horse to death," as the young farmer stood in silent dismay surveying the dead carcass of his too honest animal. The example and warning were not lost on the rest, and Beauchamp exclaimed, "There is no occasion to hurry now, as the hounds have killed their fox."

On gaining the summit of the hill, the pack was seen about a mile a-head on the open down in a group, dispatching the remains of as gallant a fox as ever broke covert. Beauchamp and Conyers, with Styles, trotted leisurely down to the spot, which Charley had already reached with Gwynne and Tyler, both light weights on thorough-bred horses.

"By Jove!" shouted Bob, in an ecstacy of delight, "this is a most glorious wind-up to the very best run I have ever seen in my life. Now, Gwynne, what do you say to Will being a d——d slow coach, in making his hounds hunt out the line for the first three or four miles?"

"I say, Bob, he is a much cleverer hand in dealing with a pack of hounds than I am with a pack of cards, and few can beat me at that

game. But how are we, Bob, as to the topographical?"

"Not quite at the Land's End yet, but over thirty miles from home, as I saw the town of Snowdon to our right, when we were climbing the hill."

Lord Malcolm and Fred Beauchamp now straggled in, having taken a wrong turn round the last covert; and as this small party, with the hounds, returned to the verge of the hill overlooking the vale, other horsemen were seen still struggling through the heavy fences, some at a slow canter, and others brought to a trot or walk; and to put a stop to their further exertions, Will Beauchamp stood with the hounds a few minutes on the summit, sending forth one loud whohoop, which might have been heard at Snowdon.

"Demmit!" exclaimed the Captain to Melville and Coventry, who were all in turn playing at "catch my horse, can't you?" "That's Will's yell, for a thousand!—They have got him somewhere; but, 'pon honour—eh! aw! Narcissus — demmit all—he's buried in this

infernal dyke—help, Melville, quickly, or he'll be smothered!"

By the exertions of all three, Narcissus was at last dragged out, more dead than alive, and lay at full length on the greensward, it appearing to be a matter of perfect indifference to him whether he made any further effort to rise.

"There, Markham," said Melville, "we cannot wait any longer, so you and Narcissus must settle the point between you, whether you sleep here or not; my advice is to put the whip into him, and drive him on before you till you get into the turnpike road, which is within half a mile of us."

The Captain was not the only person employed in this agreeable occupation of trudging along on foot with a beaten horse, when Beauchamp and the pack, with the fortunate few, entered on the high road leading to Snowdon.

"Ah, Markham," asked the master, "what's the matter—shoe lost?"

"Demmed near a horse lost, Beauchamp; regularly done up—worm crusher now—no Lifeguardsman—demmit! sha'n't get home for a week at this pace."

"Here, then, Markham, let Jack have your horse to lead into the town, and you shall ride his."

"Thank'ee, Beauchamp, but I don't like taking away your man."

"Never mind, we don't want his services now, so get up at once."

Every stable in Snowdon was occupied that night with horses so thoroughly knocked up that they could proceed no further, traps of all kinds being hired to convey their owners home, whilst others remained there until the next morning; the run from point to point being at least twenty miles, and the ground traversed not less than five or six more.

"Well, Will," inquired Malcolm, "what do you purpose doing?"

"Give the horses a bucket of gruel each, with a mouthful of hay, and then homewards."

"What, thirty miles more to-night for hounds and horses, after such a run?"

"Just so, Malcolm, they are of the right sort not to give in; but it won't do to let them get stiff by loitering about at a public-house. Quick march, is our motto, and I hope to

be home before the supper hour in the servants' hall."

"Very well, then Bob and I will overtake you on the road, and bring Markham with us."

Beauchamp was too good a sportsman, and by far too fond of his hounds and horses, to consign them to the care of servants, however trustworthy, after a severe day, always accompanying them home, and feeding the hounds himself before he left the kennels. He therefore jogged leisurely along with his pets, which once more cheered by the presence of their young master among them, trotted on with sterns erect, as if ready for a second fox.

The system adopted by Beauchamp in the management of his pack was of the silent order, with as little interference as possible in the field, to which must be attributed their uniform success in killing their foxes. Noise in man or hound being his aversion, he would allow of no halloaing or screaming from his field, which invariably occasions so much confusion, and the hounds were thrown silently into covert, and only spoken to occasionally to assure them of their master's presence. Although a fine melo-

dious voice may be very pleasing to the ear, yet instead of its being (as too often considered) a great recommendation in a huntsman to a pack of foxhounds, it is most decidedly the reverse, particularly in a woodland country, where, in nine cases out of ten, the fox will be unkenneled by the huntsman instead of his hounds. We cannot so arrange, when the fixtures are made some time before, always or very often to draw up wind, and a noisy, vociferous huntsman, when taking a line of coverts down wind, will disturb every fox (unquestionably every good one) long before the pack can get upon his drag; in fact, a good fox will be off, and perhaps miles away, before the hounds reach his kennel. It is related of the famous Butterwick Jack, a fox which had beaten Mr. Farquarson's hounds in Dorsetshire for several consecutive seasons, that upon the slamming of a gate or the sound of a horse's hoofs near the covert, he broke instantly away; and notwithstanding every precaution and the entire silence of the huntsman when throwing his pack into covert, Jack was ever on the look-out for squalls, and made so good a start that he invariably beat his pur-

suers, and saved his precious carcass from their fangs. To prevent foxes being chopped in small spinnies or gorse coverts, a few cracks from the first whipper-in's whip, as he approaches them, will be quite sufficient to make any fox on the alert which is worth hunting, and here, of course, a good huntsman will make rather more use of his voice. Foxes, however, like weasels, are seldom caught napping, except, perhaps, on a very windy day, and even then very rarely indeed.

Another part of Will Beauchamp's system was to stick to his hunted fox, whether good, bad, or indifferent. Bob Conyers would sometimes remonstrate when he was hammering away at a dodging brute, ringing round covert.

"Leave him for another day, Will, we want a gallop to warm us this cold morning."

"Bad habits grow upon foxes as well as men, Bob; and unless I finish this brute off now, he will be much harder to kill the next time we meet him, and I don't want any more of his stock left in the country."

The common practice of chopping and changing from one scent to another, leaving a half-beaten fox in covert, and taking the hounds off

to find a fresh one, is very prejudicial to the pack, causing them to lose confidence in themselves, and almost as bad as lifting them to halloas. Hounds often treated in this manner are always on the look-out for assistance when in difficulties, and will never persevere with a bad scent. A pack in the adjoining county to Beauchamp's, with a wild huntsman, were one day at fault, when a loud shouting was heard from a man on a hay-rick. "Hark holloa!" screamed the huntsman, and away went his darlings, best pace up to the hay, now followed by all the field helter-skelter for another start.

"Where's the fox gone?" shouted the huntsman.

"I ha'an't seed no fox, sur."

"Then what the devil made you halloa?"

"The ould gentleman heself, I do believe; and he'd a made yoh hallo, if you'd seed un, as I did, spring off the cut of hay; the hair riz up on my head, like a hog's bristles."

"What does the fool mean?" asked the huntsman, in a furious passion.

"Why, I do'an't know what it manes, but I tell ye, when I put the ladder agin the mow, a

long-tailed crittur jumped out of the nich of hay, and cut away into yonder copse, and the very sight of un was enow to make any body holler; but, dang it! look there hur zits in thick big oak."

And, on the horsemen riding to the wood hedge, a large baboon was seen sitting in the tree, chattering and making faces at his friends below.

"Hah! hah! hah!" shouted Tom Larking, a leading man in the hunt, "a devilish good joke, Jem, to be halload on to a monkey! but, hang it, let's have him out. He'll show us a run; now we have lost our fox."

"My hounds run a monkey, sir!" exclaimed Jem, indignantly. "They ain't come to that pass yet, any ways."

"I'll bet five to one they do run him, though, Jem," persisted Larkins; but Jem, fearing mischief, trotted briskly away to find another fox, leaving Jacko to be handled by any one else who fancied him.

Whatever may be said of Will Beauchamp's system of hunting, the result was that his pack seldom required, and never expected, assistance from their huntsman; very few foxes being able to escape them.

CHAPTER IX.

For some days after, the great run from the Barton woods was the favourite topic among all sportsmen in that locality; but the all-engrossing subject to the ladies was the Grand Union Hunt Ball, under the management of a committee chosen from the members of the four adjoining hunts.

The ball-room at Cherrington being inadequate to contain half the company expected on this great occasion, the Town Hall, which stood over the market house, was put in requisition, and the large space underneath was boarded over and enclosed for a supper-room. The pre-

parations made for this grand re-union of fox-hunters were on a magnificent scale, and the decorations for the rooms costly and appropriate. Being the first thing of the sort attempted in that neighbourhood, the committee spared neither trouble nor expense in their arrangements, being determined, in the spirit of true sportsmen, that the thing should be done well—and well it was done. The members of each hunt had the option of appearing in their respective dress coats, but the general company were requested to be in uniform or fancy costume. The highest families for many miles in every direction sought eagerly for cards of admission to this splendid *féte*, which were only at first obtainable from members of the four hunts; but it was deemed advisable in some cases to depart from this rule, and an additional number was issued for persons of distinction residing within prescribed limits; and more than one fox-killing *pater familias* was fairly run down by wife and daughters all at him at once, and obliged to promise never to destroy another fox.

The gentlemanly conduct of the committee, who did all in their power to accommodate the

numerous applicants having any pretensions from property or influence in the country to ask for tickets, was the general theme of conversation, and the Grand Union Ball became the subject of great interest in the most fashionable circles for weeks previously.

Beauchamp sent two of his tickets to Mrs. Gordon and Blanche, reserving one for Sir Francis Burnett, who had promised to attend; and Lord Malcolm, to propitiate the Harcourts, enclosed two also for their acceptance. The anxiously expected evening at length arrived, and by ten o'clock the rooms were crowded with as gay and brilliant an assemblage as ever graced a ball-room; the costumes of the ladies being of the most *recherchée* and elegant description.

Blanche and her friend Constance appeared in the simple Scotch costume of white muslin and tartan. Selina Markham assumed the character of a lady of George the Second's reign, figuring away with Bob Conyers in a minuet, similarly disguised in the attire of a courtier of that period. Her sister Caroline, with the Rollestons and a friend on a visit, represented the seasons of the year, and formed a quadrille

which was much admired; but, beyond these, it were needless to attempt a description of the various costumes and characters, borrowed almost from every age and every clime, which graced and enlivened the festive scene.

Of the gentlemen the most conspicuous was William Carrington, the master of the S. W. Hunt, whose towering height and immense proportions attracted all eyes.

"Ah! Carrington," exclaimed Beauchamp, shaking him by the hand, "glad to see you! All ready to trip it on the light fantastic toe, I suppose?"

"I don't come here, Beauchamp, to make a fool of myself by attempting such a feat as that, (which suits only herring-made fellows like yourself), but to see my friends—besides, unless there were extra props to the floor, a few hops and skips on these rickety boards, from a man of twenty stone, would send you all down to the regions below. There's a clever pack to look at got together here, particularly the B—— ladies, I mean;" correcting himself—"although they don't match as to colour. Handsome, fine-shaped girls, eh, Beauchamp?"

"Yes, I think the B—— pack before us (as you call them) such a lot as is rarely seen in one room."

"Well, Beauchamp, but I want to see the heroine or heiress who so nearly ran you to ground. They say she is a clipper; and I wish you would point her out to me."

"I will introduce you to her presently, Carrington," replied Beauchamp; "but now my hands are full of business."

Lord and Lady Seaton (acquaintances of the Harcourts, who lived about twenty miles from Cherrington) were invited to Throseby for this grand event, with the Marquis of Danby, who was then staying with them, a young nobleman of great promise, now in his twenty-fourth year, and who held a commission in the Life Guards. Lord Danby was about the general standard as to height, although rather slightly formed; aristocratic looking, with handsome features and very pleasing manners; and, although his father, the Duke of Delamere, was still in the prime of life, the heir to a dukedom was, of course, eagerly coveted by many mammas in the highest circles, who had daughters to dispose of. Lord

Danby was, however, too cautious and sensible to be caught by mere personal beauty, or that greater attraction in the present day—money. He was, moreover, very partial to field-sports, and a determined fox-hunter; and having heard from Lord Seaton of the Union Hunt Ball, he came down purposely for the occasion.

Mrs. Harcourt, as may be supposed, rose a hundred per cent. in her own estimation, when entering the room that night, leaning on the arm of such a lion as the Marquis of Danby, whom she sought an early opportunity of introducing to Mrs. Gordon and her niece, parading him with an air of great dignity and importance, which was considerably diminished when Lord Danby shook hands with Beauchamp in the most friendly manner, who just then approached to claim Blanche for his partner in the opening dance of the night.

Lord Danby, being very much struck at first sight with Blanche's extreme loveliness, (enhanced that evening by her simple, unaffected costume), begged the honour of dancing the next quadrille, which was acceded to. On leading his partner away, she asked Beauchamp the name

of the gentleman who had just been introduced by Mrs. Harcourt, which she had imperfectly heard.

"The Marquis of Danby, Blanche, son of the Duke of Delamere," was the reply.

"You know him, William, I see."

"Yes, dear girl, I have met him occasionally in the hunting field, and his father and mine are old acquaintances; but I am at a loss to conceive how he can be staying at Throseby—that, however, I will ascertain presently."

Lord Danby, not seeing much fun in being paraded any longer by Mrs. Harcourt, took the earliest opportunity of consigning her to a seat, and soon after encountered Captain Markham.

"Ah, Danby! 'pon honour—quite astonished to find you here—grand affair, eh!—well got up, and all that sort of thing. But where are you staying, old fellow?"

"At the Harcourts, Markham, with my friends, the Seatons, who were invited to Throseby for this ball."

"Ah! ah! I see. Old Harcourt is well enough in his way—gives good spreads, and keeps a first-rate artist in the culinary; but

that match-making, haughty wife of his is my aversion, 'pon honour."

"Very likely," replied Danby; "but I hear you have had splendid sport in this part of the world."

"Yaas, Danby, first rate, and no mistake—such a run from our woods—thirty miles at least—every horse beaten—some killed—others can't show—Narcissus regularly floored."

"Well, Markham, I feel inclined to send for my horses down here, and have a week or two with you, if I can get good stabling in the neighbourhood."

"That you can, my lord, I will answer for; at Barton Court our stalls are not half filled, and you shall have a stable to yourself, and a right good welcome from my governor."

"No, no, Markham, I cannot do that."

"And why not, Danby, eh?—oh, I see—Duke's son—won't condescend—*infra dig.*—and all that sort of thing."

"No, on my honour, Markham, that was not my reason for refusing your friendly offer."

"Then, demmit, Danby, there can be no other; but here comes Sir Lionel, as game an old cock as ever wore spurs."

Markham, having introduced his father to Lord Danby, left them together, saying, "There, governor, Danby wants to see our pack, so hold him by the button until he promises to spend a month at Barton Court."

Lord Danby was so much pleased with the urbanity of the old baronet that he at last accepted the invitation, and stood listening to his account of their great run, until Beauchamp, having finished his dance, was leading Blanche back to her aunt. If Lord Danby was at first so much taken with Blanche's loveliness of person, he was much more captivated with her artless, unaffected manners and cheerful, unsophisticated mind, which made him desire to be more intimately acquainted with her, and at the end of their dance he pleaded for a second, which was not refused, Blanche being much pleased with his quiet, gentlemanly demeanour, and thinking, as a friend of Beauchamp's, there could be no impropriety in accepting him a second time for her partner. It unfortunately so happened that Beauchamp had previously engaged Blanche for the sixth quadrille, which not noticing, from a waltz intervening, she had

taken to mean the *seventh* dance, unwittingly accepting both him and Lord Danby for the same set; and as Beauchamp was hurrying through the crowd in search of his partner when the time arrived, he found her with Lord Danby just taking their position in the set then forming, Lord Malcolm and Constance standing near.

"I think," said Beauchamp, in a low tone to her, "you are engaged to me for this quadrille."

"Oh no, William, you must have made a mistake, as this is the seventh dance."

"But only the sixth quadrille," added Beauchamp, "which you promised me, did you not, Blanche?"

"Yes," she replied, "I recollect now that was the case, but as it did not occur to me when I accepted Lord Danby, I do not know how I can well refuse to dance with him, since we have taken our places."

"Well, then, Blanche, will you dance the next quadrille with me?"

"For that I am engaged to Captain Melville."

"The succeeding one, then?"

"I have promised that to Major Hammond."

"Ah, yes, I see," exclaimed Beauchamp, in an offended tone, "your engagements to me are to be broken, but not to others."

And he was turning indignantly away, when Lord Danby said, "I fear, Beauchamp, there is some misunderstanding with Miss Douglas and yourself about this quadrille, and if you have a prior claim to mine, which I gather from your words, I will, although most reluctantly, resign her hand for this set, trusting to be more fortunate in another."

"Oh no," replied Beauchamp, "Miss Douglas has made her election in favour of your Lordship, although previously engaged to me, and of course therefore I must retire," with which he turned haughtily round and left them.

Lord Malcolm, who was near enough to hear all that passed between Blanche and Beauchamp, looked serious. Blanche was so hurt as to be ready to cry, and Lord Danby, although flattered by her preference for him, felt rather uncomfortable. "I am really sorry," he observed to Blanche, "for this unpleasant misunderstand-

ing, but I hope you will acquit me of the least intentional offence to Mr. Beauchamp."

"It is entirely my own fault," replied Blanche. "I remember now I did promise Mr. Beauchamp the sixth quadrille, which this unfortunately is, although the seventh dance."

"Oh, never mind, Blanche," whispered Malcolm, "I will set this mistake right with Beauchamp presently, although he is confoundedly captious sometimes, and here I fear he has been treated rather unceremoniously, as I think, having the first claim, you should have waived that of the Captain or Major in his favour, at least, or have at once accepted his arm in place of Lord Danby's."

"But really, Charles, I did not intend to offend him, although wishing to avoid being considered rude by Lord Danby when the set was formed."

"No, my dear girl, that I hope he does not believe, and I will endeavour to smooth down this unpleasantness."

After the quadrille was concluded, Malcolm sought his friend, trying to persuade him to ask Blanche for another dance, which he hoped

might be the means of reconciling this little difference.

"No, Malcolm," he replied, "I will sue no further, having done so three times in vain, and when positively in the right, to be postponed even for a Duke's son is not very palatable."

"Come, come, Beauchamp, don't give way to temper."

"No, Malcolm, temper has little to do with my present feelings, which are acute enough, without your accusing me of being bad-tempered—that I am not, and never have been, although I can feel an insult from those I love more deeply than any man living. But now I am engaged, and must go in search of my partner."

As he turned away, Malcolm said, "Mind, Beauchamp, you are of our party to the supper-table;" to which no answer was returned.

On Malcolm's seeking Blanche, whom he found sitting with her aunt Gordon, she anxiously enquired, "Well, Charles, have you succeeded in pacifying William?"

"No, dear girl, I am sorry to say I have not yet prevailed; he seems exceedingly hurt,

and says you refused him three times, and that you ought at once to have taken his arm, instead of Lord Danby's, as being positively engaged to him before his Lordship. This admits of no doubt, Blanche; and he also feels very much annoyed that you should have shewn so distinguishing a mark of favour to Lord Danby, by accepting him for two dances so close upon each other, contrary to etiquette and his advice, and thereby placing him you have known so long in an inferior position to an acquaintance of a few hours. This is too true, my dear girl, and Beauchamp, with all his warm, generous feelings, although most sensitive, is also most determined, and will put up with no slight or indifference from those he loves."

"Indeed, indeed, Charles," replied Blanche, with the tears standing in her eyes, "I did not intend, as you must know, either to offend or slight William; but I thought it would appear so very rude to Lord Danby, to refuse dancing with him, when we had taken our places."

"Yes, Blanche, that may be all very true, but recollect, it is far better to appear rude to a stranger than to act unkindly and unfairly to

one of the dearest friends you will ever find in this world; and had Constance treated me as you have Will Beauchamp, I don't know what would have been the consequence; for I tell you plainly it would have put me in a terrible passion."

"Oh, Charles, I am indeed miserable that you should also think so hardly of me," replied poor Blanche; "but, pray, go and tell William, I am so sorry in having offended him, that I will hold myself bound to dance with him before any other person, and will sit down until I have first fulfilled my promise to himself."

At this moment, Captain Melville approached to claim her hand, when she pleaded a bad headache, and begged to be excused dancing with him till after supper, when, if better, she would be happy to accept him as a partner. "Independent of which," she said, quietly yet firmly, "I have made a great mistake in the dances to-night, and was really engaged to Mr. Beauchamp before you asked me."

As Melville, with a low bow, withdrew, Malcolm applauded Blanche for her resolution in acting so firmly and honourably towards her lover,

even at the risk of offending others,—and said, "Now, Blanche, you are on even terms again, and should Beauchamp decline your proffered olive branch, I shall take part against him."

Malcolm was not long in explaining to Beauchamp his cousin's regret for what had occurred, and her determination to dance with no other, until she had fulfilled her engagement to himself; which brought him to her side immediately—softened, although not satisfied. Blanche held out her hand as he approached, and on his sitting down, she candidly admitted her fault, and want of consideration, in dancing with Lord Danby.

"Pray, say no more, Blanche, you have a perfect right to please yourself, and I have no pretensions to dictate to you; but as you were so averse to behave rudely, as you thought, to Lord Danby, you will of course feel equally reluctant to offend either Captain Melville or Major Hammond, to whom you told me you were engaged for the two next dances; and therefore, to avoid any more unpleasantness to yourself (as I find you have already refused Melville on my account), I will explain to him how the matter really stood

between us, and take my chance after supper. Don't you think, Malcolm," asked Beauchamp, appealing to him, "this is the proper course to pursue, to avoid further remarks?"

An assent being given, Beauchamp went in search of Melville, when Malcolm observed to Blanche,—"He is stiff and formal still, dear girl, and my impression is you will find him so for some little time; but, take my advice, don't ever dance twice with a stranger, to his exclusion, for he is confoundedly jealous and particular in some things, and as haughty as a prince when treated with indifference; but here he comes," as Beauchamp again approached, "saying Captain Melville consented to take his turn after the Major, and now, Blanche," taking a card and pencil from his pocket, "if you will, on due reflection, mark any one dance on the list after supper, and give it to me on my return, I will hold myself engaged to you, even though it should be the very last."

"You are not going to leave us again now, William," said Mrs. Gordon; "I have not seen you the whole evening; so sit down with me a little, unless you prefer strangers to your aunt."

"No, dear aunt, that is not my character, you well know; those I profess to love, I love deeply and for ever, and no stranger can ever induce me to waver for one moment in my affections or respect to those who are entitled to my esteem and confidence."

Soon after, Major Hammond came up, offering his arm to Blanche; and when they were alone, Mrs. Gordon said, "You have sufficiently punished dear Blanche for her trifling error, to-night, William, and you are now more severe to her than she deserves."

"The happiness of life, dear aunt, depends on trifles apparently as light as air; and the disposition is shown as much in little things as in great events; and you see my anticipations about Blanche are being realised. I fear it will be some time before she really knows her own mind. What! ought Lord Danby, or a dozen lords, to influence her conduct towards one she professes to love, and make him feel insignificant in the presence of a perfect stranger! A woman cannot love the man she would help to humiliate. No, no, aunt, it harasses me to think more about Blanche's treatment, which has sunk deep

in my heart. No sooner have I risked my life to save her from one lord than I am nearly involved in a quarrel with another, whom she thinks proper to patronise and place on an equal, if not superior, footing, to myself; but from this night Blanche is free to act as she pleases, without the least reference to me, as I will never presume to advise or influence her for the future; in fact, I believe she does not rightly yet understand her own feelings towards me, which, most probably, are those of sisterly regard only, as she appears to be so much taken, at first sight, with Lord Danby."

"William, you are now not only severe but unjust also, and are magnifying a trifle into a serious offence. Blanche has atoned and suffered most severely for her error, and it was all I could do to console her. Will you make me also miserable, as well as herself?"

"No, dear aunt, I will say no more; perhaps I have said too much."

"Then you will be kind to her as usual, when she returns; and be once again my own dear William?"

"Yes, my kindest of friends; I would not

pain you for the world, and you shall have no cause to find fault with me again to-night."

When Blanche returned with her partner, Beauchamp rose and received her with his usual kind manner, and taking her hand in his, whispered, "I have been too severe upon you, dear Blanche; will you forgive my excited feelings?"

"Yes, indeed, dear William, I do, for I know I have acted very wrong, and have dreaded lest I might involve you in a quarrel by my wavering conduct; but it shall never be repeated, if you will trust me for the future; my inexperience of the world makes me feel the want of your kind, friendly advice, which never again shall be disregarded, to do what I feel to be right, not what it may be convenient to do. And now, to show you my contrition for treating you so cavalierly, I will, after fulfilling my engagement to Captain Melville, accept no other partner but yourself for the remainder of the evening."

"That, indeed, I cannot allow, Blanche."

"But you cannot help it, William," she said gaily; "my resolution is taken, and being a right one, it shall not be broken."

"Well, dear girl, we will talk of that presently, as Melville is approaching; but bear in mind you are of our party at the supper table, where I have reserved places; so return to us immediately your dance is finished, or even before, if you see a movement in that direction."

Melville was rallying Blanche on her forgetfulness of her engagements that evening, in the last figure of the quadrille, when, seeing a rush towards the door leading to the supper room, she hastily said, "I must join my party, Captain Melville, this moment, which is an engagement I made before entering this room, and therefore I am of course bound to keep before all others."

"Oh, never mind, there will be plenty of time yet, and I will find you a place."

"Then I must go without you, as I certainly shall not offend my aunt Gordon by not being ready to attend her as I promised."

"Oh, Miss Douglas, I cannot allow you to go alone, and will of course attend you."

Constance and Mrs. Gordon, with Malcolm and Beauchamp, met them as they were returning, when the latter said, "There is room for you at our table, Melville, if you will join our party."

"Most willingly, Beauchamp," was the reply; and in this order, Mrs. Gordon having Beauchamp's arm, they descended the stairs to the supper room, when Melville whispered to Blanche, "I do not now regret the interruption to our dance, as it has afforded me the enviable position of sitting near you and basking in the sunshine of those smiles I value beyond all price."

"Pray, spare me such fulsome compliments, Captain Melville," said Blanche, loud enough for Beauchamp to hear, "I do not like fine speeches;" which stopped the Captain from any further attempts in that line.

CHAPTER X.

FOUR long tables were arranged in the supper room for the members of the four hunts, at the head of which each master presided; and, Will Beauchamp took his place, with Mrs. Gordon on one hand, and Blanche on the other, at the head of his table, the old Squire sitting next to Blanche, and Malcolm on the other side below Mrs. Gordon; next in succession came Sir Lionel Markham with his party, Sir Francis Burnett, Gwynne, and other members of the hunt, Bob Conyers facing William Beauchamp as vice president at the lower end, around whom all the youngsters, (as Bob called them), were

congregated with their partners. Of eatables and potables there was a grand display, with a profusion of game, wild fowl, &c., with the usual accompaniments of confectionary exhibited on such occasions, to which, when the company had paid ample attention, the toasts of the evening succeeded. The health of the ladies was of course received with rapturous applause, for which Bob Conyers returned thanks on their behalf in a very humorous and gallant speech, being the oldest bachelor of the company,—jocosely taking his date from the age of George the Second.

"You behold, ladies and gentlemen," said Bob, "in your humble servant a true specimen of the bashful man, who has had the misfortune to be in love ever since entering his *teens*, and who has now advanced very deep into the *ties*, without being tied up himself; the fact is, ladies, I never could muster courage to pop the question, for, when the time arrived for popping, the cork would never come out; in short, I am like a stale bottle of stout, there's no pop left in me, and then as to a choice—these lines are continually running in my head,

'How happy could I be with either,
Were t'other dear charmer away.'

My sensitive and soft heart is ever receiving impressions, but the wax is always melting, for it aint like cobbler's wax, which keeps many a man in the saddle. This very night I have fallen in love ten times, at least, already, and were I offered the selection of all the beauty here assembled on this auspicious occasion to do us honour, for my life I could never make up my mind, ladies, which to choose, as you all appear so irresistibly bewitching. I see some men looking unutterably soft things, and others whispering exceedingly foolish ones to their fair partners, whilst I am standing by my unfortunate partner's side like an oaf, twisting and twirling her fan (I believe I have broken half-a-dozen to-night); but the very attempt to make love absolutely chokes me; in short, unless some kind soul, pitying my distressed situation, does actually propose for me, Bob Conyers must continue a bachelor to the end of the chapter. It behoves me now, gentlemen, on behalf of the ladies, to express their thanks for the compliment paid them, and the married who have

experienced the felicity of connubial bliss offer their matronly advice to all their younger sisters to change their state as soon as possible; and my advice to young bachelors is to take warning by the fate of Bob Conyers, and to strike while the iron is warm and pliable."

The next toast was fox-hunting, to which no one for some time appeared inclined to respond, each master expecting the other would rise; but Beauchamp, being the youngest, knew very well he could not be required to do so, out of respect to his seniors. The Honourable Mr. Manvers, master of the V—— Hunt, at length stood up, and thus addressed the company—

"Ladies and gentlemen, one would suppose, from the dead silence among the masters of fox-hounds, that not one of them could give tongue, whereas, to my certain knowledge, all possess stentorian, lungs except myself, who am unfortunately a squeaker. The master of the C—— Hunt is notoriously a very fast man across country, greatly my senior in years, and my superior in sporting achievements—quick enough to speak his mind in the field without much ceremony or circumlocution; and of

course, therefore, the most proper person to return thanks on this occasion;—but he is evidently a timid, bashful man in ladies' society; and although looking as fierce as a lion at fences, I fear, like my friend Conyers, he will never muster courage to pop the question. Then there's the master of the S. W. Hunt, who, if he could be prevailed on to open his mouth, must be a speaker of great weight, his longitude and latitude being of the Anak order, and I may say, 'Oh, that this too, too solid flesh would melt, and resolve itself into a *speech.* (A murmur from Carrington, 'that's my infirmity, sir.') Lastly, there is the master of the hunt in whose district we are now assembled, who, by all accounts, can fight, if he can't speak in defence of the ladies."

After some flattering remarks on the fair sex, Manvers resumed his seat.

A move was soon after made; and, as the ladies were leaving, Blanche whispered Beauchamp:—

"You will find me disengaged, William, whenever you return."

"No, no, my dear Blanche, this must not be. Do not think me so unreasonable."

"It must be so, dear William, until you join us" — on which she took her aunt's arm.

Beauchamp, from his position as president, was obliged to continue his sitting at his table during the delivery of a few other toasts, much to his annoyance; as several gentlemen had already deserted to the more agreeable society of the fair sex in the ball-room, who, from the movement heard overhead, were evidently much more pleasantly occupied than in listening to the drones who were attempting to utter dull speeches below.

Manvers, determined to have the master of the C—— Hunt on his legs, proposed his health, which, after being duly honoured, forced to rise.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began; ("The ladies are gone," was shouted out.) "I beg pardon — well, then, gentlemen, I'll begin again. Ladies and gentlemen;" — shouts of laughter.

"Let him have it," cried Gwynne, "that's his text; he can't preach from any other. Now then, old cock, out with it." "We give you la-

dies and gentlemen" (shouts of laughter—order, order, from Sir Francis Burnett—hear, hear, from Gwynne).

"Gentlemen," said the master of the C—— Hunt, "for the honour you have done me, in drinking my health, I return you my best thanks, and beg to say—that (another pause)—I beg to say that I feel"—(another pause) when a voice replied:—

"A bigger fool than I ever thought myself."

Roars of laughter again burst forth, during which the master of the C—— Hunt resumed his seat in a violent passion; and thus this speechifying terminated.

Lord Danby was one of the first to quit the supper table, Blanche Douglas having thrown a spell of fascination over him, which made him most anxious to become more intimately acquainted with her; when, finding her sitting with her two aunts, Harcourt and Gordon, and Lady Seaton, he joined their party, and stood talking with Blanche, until the sets were again beginning to form.

"Really, Miss Douglas, this is the most delightful ball," Lord Danby observed, "I have

ever attended—every thing is so well arranged, and the great variety of beautiful and elegant costumes selected by the ladies renders it quite a fairy scene. The music also is so enlivening, one feels it almost impossible to resist its influence. Are you not, also, very fond of dancing, Miss Douglas?"

"Oh, yes!" she replied. "I enjoy a ball exceedingly."

"Then, as I perceive you have no partner, will you consider me too presuming in petitioning for the honour of another dance?"

"I must beg to decline, Lord Danby, bring already engaged."

"Really," he continued, "I think your partner, whoever he may be, deserves severe punishment for his negligence or indifference, in preferring his friends' society in the supper-room to yours."

"He may, perhaps, be detained there against his inclination," she replied; "or, probably, is not aware that dancing has recommenced."

"You are very considerate and forbearing, Miss Douglas, where, perhaps, your clemency may fail to be appreciated; although I can scarcely believe it possible any gentleman could

for a moment forget an engagement with yourself."

"Then, of course," she added, "my partner being unavoidably absent, I cannot think of punishing him unjustly by accepting another in his place."

"But if you will accept my arm conditionally," pleaded Danby, "until he makes his appearance, I promise to resign your hand the moment he approaches."

Blanche still quietly declined, when Mrs. Harcourt overhearing her, interposed; "Surely, my dear, you will not refuse Lord Danby on such fair conditions; it is your partner's duty to be in attendance, if he wished to dance with you; and you are not to sit still to suit his convenience."

"I have danced twice with Lord Danby already this evening, aunt Harcourt, and having experienced some unpleasantness in accepting one partner when engaged to another, I prefer sitting down to causing any further disagreement."

"Oh, that is the gentlemen's affair, my dear; you have nothing to do with their differences."

"Indeed, but I think she has, Mrs. Harcourt,"

observed aunt Gordon, "and Blanche is acting most wisely in declining to give offence to any one;" and putting her niece's arm within her own, she walked off to another part of the room.

"You have done quite right, my dearest girl," said aunt Gordon, "in refusing Lord Danby; and I hope you will never follow Mrs. Harcourt's advice, who does not care what scrapes she may lead you into, or what annoyance you may suffer, when a lord is in the case; vain, foolish woman! one would think she had caused mischief enough already by trying to force Lord Vancourt upon you; but here comes William. Well, sir," she said, "are you not ashamed of yourself, to be sitting drinking with your boon companions so long, when you knew you were engaged to Blanche?"

"Indeed, dear aunt, I was not aware that such was the case, or nothing should have prevented me leaving the room earlier; although, as it is, I have given great offence by resigning my presidential chair so soon."

"Well, William, I was only joking, but, as this quadrille is now half finished, sit down with

me and Blanche in this snug corner, and tell us what that shouting was about."

Beauchamp gladly complied ; and his fair listeners laughed exceedingly at his description of the Master of the C. Hunt's attempts to return thanks.

When Beauchamp stood up with Blanche some short time afterwards, Lord Danby remarked to Mrs. Harcourt, "Oh, I see, now, who the gentleman is to whom Miss Douglas was so unwilling to give offence ; and I am told Mr. Beauchamp is decidedly in great favour, if not already engaged to her ; yet, considering what has occurred, this is almost a natural consequence."

"You are greatly mis-informed, Lord Danby ; Mr. Beauchamp cannot be engaged to my niece without her guardian's consent, which, I am quite sure, he will never obtain from Mr. Harcourt ; nor has it ever been solicited. He and Miss Douglas have been known to each other from childhood, which makes them, of course, on very intimate terms ; and Lord Malcolm, her cousin, is also, I believe, engaged to Mr. Beauchamp's sister."

"Oh, perhaps, then," said Lord Danby, "this may account for that cordiality which is observable in their manner to each other."

"Most certainly," replied Mrs. Harcourt, "Mr. Beauchamp cannot reasonably entertain any other views towards my niece, knowing the utter impossibility of his ever standing in a nearer relation to her, than he does at present."

Lord Danby, thus assured by Mrs. Harcourt, and knowing no cause to doubt her authority or sincerity in speaking so unreservedly on the subject, treated Blanche's rumoured engagement to Beauchamp as mere gossip, without any good foundation; and accordingly resolved to prosecute his suit if, on nearer acquaintance, she realized his expectations.

Beauchamp, although not doubting Blanche's resolution to adhere to her intention of not accepting any other partner than himself for the remainder of the evening, thought it more prudent to compromise the matter by engaging her for the last dance only.

"It would be very improper in me, dear girl," he observed, "to expose you to the remarks which would assuredly follow, and excite

Mrs. Harcourt's suspicions of our attachment, which, for the present, it is more prudent to conceal; but, believe me, I do not for a moment doubt your constancy, or love for me as a brother," he added in a lower tone, which she did not appear to have heard.

"What can I say, then, William, to Lord Danby, should he ask me again? Mrs. Harcourt will take offence, I suppose, if I refuse him."

"You are not to consult Mrs. Harcourt's, but your own feelings, Blanche, in such cases; and knowing the general opinion on this point, you, of course, are the best judge, whether you feel inclined to give further encouragement to Lord Danby by such a very particular mark of favour, as accepting him three times for your partner, on the first night of your acquaintance. Lord Danby and lookers-on will of course draw the natural conclusion that you approve those marked attentions; but if you do not intend to give him encouragement, you can plead fatigue, or other engagements." Beauchamp, having thus expressed himself, consigned Blanche to Mrs. Gordon's care, who was soon relieved of

her charge by a succession of applicants for the honour of her niece's hand; which was not permitted to remain idle until the dawn of morning put an end to further exertions.

CHAPTER XI.

THE next day, a grand muster of fox-hunters took place about four miles from Cherrington, where the young Squire made his appearance about twelve o'clock; and his usual good fortune having attended him, resulting in a good day's sport, all retired from the field well satisfied. The third morning, Beauchamp rode over to the Priory, and remained until after luncheon; when, sitting with Blanche in the drawing-room, to his surprise Captain Markham was announced, accompanied by Lord Danby.

"Ah, Beauchamp, old fellow, good day's sport, yesterday, — 'pon honor. Danby thinks

first-rate. Called to enquire how the ladies were after the ball. Capital band, Miss Douglas,—lots of partners—grand affair, don't you think so?"

"Yes, Captain Markham, every thing was exceedingly well arranged, and reflects great credit on fox-hunters."

Lord Danby, although received rather formally by Beauchamp, was very courteous in his address to Blanche; hoping she did not feel over-fatigued by her great exertions, with many other little speeches of this nature, usual on such occasions; soon after which the visitors took their leave.

"Beauchamp again," remarked Lord Danby to his friend, during their ride home; "there must be something more in his constant attentions to Miss Douglas than Mrs. Harcourt imagines."

"Can't say, Danby, 'pon honour—don't concern me—mind my own business—every fellow must take care of himself; but Harcourt is a crusty old customer—very, won't give in—swears Beauchamp sha'n't have her—can't be had without his consent—ward, and all that sort of thing."

"Well, I hardly know what to think, Markham."

"Take my advice, Danby—think nothing about it, but act as you feel inclined—field open to all—no poaching—win her, if you can—worth having—lots of tin—capital chance—Marchioness of Danby—sure to take."

"I do not regard her fortune, Markham, and believe she would not marry me for my title, unless my first impressions of her character are very erroneous. But it is quite premature my talking in this manner upon so short an acquaintance."

A few nights after, Mrs. Gordon, Lord Malcolm, and Blanche, with the Beauchamp family, dined at Barton Court, and after dinner, Lord Danby paid particular attention to Miss Douglas, sitting near her the greatest part of the evening, evidently fascinated by her unaffected manners and exceeding loveliness; in fact, from that time he fell really in love with her. Beauchamp, guessing what was passing in Lord Danby's mind, kept at a distance, from that feeling of hauteur which jealousy engenders, and Mrs. Gordon witnessed with alarm

his contracting brows and compressed lips. Selina Markham, also, noticing his grave deportment and thoughtful looks, whispered—

"What is the matter with you to-night, Will Beauchamp?—You look like a judge with his black cap on, about to pronounce sentence of death on some unhappy culprit. I read your thoughts—the culprit is Danby—another lord to shoot, eh, Will?"

"Nonsense, Selina."

"Sense, Will Beauchamp; I have been watching your savage looks at the little flirtation going on in that quiet corner between Blanche and Danby; but don't be alarmed, he is not the fellow to run away with her, or attempt it—all right and above board this time. But seriously speaking, Beauchamp, if you are, as I believe, truly in love with Blanche, make me your confidant, and I will soon check my lord from further advances."

"Thank you, Selina, for your friendly intentions, but Blanche is free to choose whom she pleases."

"Is it so, William?—Are you not already engaged?" There was no reply. "I had

hoped," added Selina, "that you were; but take my advice, don't be a spooney, but propose at once."

"And be at once rejected by Harcourt. No, no, Selina, I have too much pride for that; but say no more now, or we shall be overheard."

From that night Lord Danby became a frequent visitor at the Priory, where his very quiet, gentlemanly manners and amiable disposition soon won upon all the family; so much so, that even Mrs. Gordon felt very much pleased with his company, although never failing in her loyalty to Beauchamp, of whom she now saw so little as to excite great misgivings in her mind. Lord Danby was at first generally accompanied by Markham or his sister, but now often rode over there alone, and sometimes on hunting days, which at last excited Mrs. Gordon's suspicions that he entertained serious intentions towards her niece.

"Blanche," she said, one day, after finding on her return to the house that he had been sitting with her some time in the drawing-room while she was occupied in her garden, "Lord Danby

has paid a long visit—I hear he has been here more than an hour, and I begin to think with Charles, his attentions to you, my dear girl, can admit of only one interpretation. But seriously, Blanche, what do you think of him?"

"He is very agreeable, dear aunt, pleasing, and good-humoured, and I like him very much; Charles also appears to be on very friendly terms with him, and speaks highly in his praise."

"Yes, my dear, he is certainly, as far as I can judge from our short acquaintance, a very unaffected, excellent young man, but it is quite clear now that his visits here are unquestionably on your account, and William, from his unusual absence, has evidently heard and believes the same. Are you prepared, therefore, my dear child, (as I will never influence you in the choice of a husband) to receive him as a suitor for your hand, to the exclusion of Beauchamp, whom, after due reflection, you may only love as a brother? If so, dear Blanche, knowing William's deep, disinterested regard for you, pray, be candid with me, as your true welfare is my first consideration, so do not hesitate in telling

me if you prefer Lord Danby, that I may break to William that his hopes are at an end."

"Oh, no, my dearest aunt," exclaimed Blanche, throwing her arms round her neck, "I never did, never can love any other than dear William; but he has been so distant lately that I almost fear he has ceased to love me."

"Then had he ceased to love you, dear girl, would you accept Lord Danby?"

"No, dear aunt, that is impossible, I could not love again so soon, if ever."

"My own dear child, then rest assured you are as secure of William's affection as of my own, which neither time nor absence can ever change; but you know his keen, sensitive feelings, and often-expressed resolution never to stand in your way, if he thought you preferred another more eligible than himself. Poor fellow! I know what he must have suffered lately, since we dined at Barton Court, when I noticed his deep, thoughtful looks fixed on you and Lord Danby when sitting together. But now, dear Blanche, he will soon return, when he knows your feelings are unchanged."

After this conversation, Mrs. Gordon sought

Malcolm, and telling him of her explanation with Blanche, begged him to ride directly to Bampton and entreat William Beauchamp to come over to the Priory the next day. Malcolm lost no time in finding his friend; and having at last satisfied his scruples and allayed his suspicions, which were hard to overcome, he obtained his promise to comply with Mrs. Gordon's request. This same afternoon Lord Danby, after his very agreeable *téte-à-téte* with Blanche, and construing her pleased and sometimes embarrassed looks into a warmer sentiment, coupling with these also his kind reception at the Priory and Beauchamp's apparent indifference, all combined impressing him with the idea that he could not now sue in vain; he rode directly to Throseby, and finding Mr. Harcourt at home, proposed for his ward, and was, of course without much hesitation, accepted. After expressing his grateful thanks to Mr. Harcourt, Lord Danby begged permission to plead his own cause in person to Miss Douglas, before his formal proposal should be made known.

"Certainly, my lord," replied Mr. Harcourt;

"if you particularly wish it, I can have no possible objection to such a request, provided you are quite sure of the duke's approbation."

"I have already consulted him on the subject, Mr. Harcourt, and there is his reply," handing him a letter from his father.

"This is perfectly satisfactory, my lord," replied Mr. Harcourt, "and you have our best wishes for your success."

The next morning, about eleven o'clock, Lord Danby directed his course to the Priory. Blanche was sitting by herself in the drawing-room (her aunt having, as usual after breakfast, gone to her poultry-yard), when the door opened, and he was announced. She would gladly have made any excuse to leave the room, but that being impossible without great apparent rudeness, she sat down with a tremor and embarrassment, so very visible and unlike her usual manner that it could not escape the notice of Lord Danby, who felt his hopes rise at what he very naturally concluded evinced a warmer feeling towards him than that of a mere acquaintance; and thus encouraged, he took advantage of the present opportunity to press his suit and avow the feel-

ings of love and affection, which ever since his first introduction to her had been daily increasing.

After a few common-place remarks, his Lordship observed that his visit to Barton Court was drawing to a close. "A visit, Miss Douglas, which has been productive of more pleasure to me than I can express, but from which the happiness or misery of my future life will be dated; need I say that on you that happiness depends — wealth and rank I offer you (though I feel these would have little weight), but what is far beyond these, a heart deeply and devotedly your own, and which has never been given to another. Say, dearest Miss Douglas," taking her hand, "if I may hope to be fortunate enough to possess this treasure?"

Poor Blanche was quite overwhelmed with pain and confusion at this unequivocal proposal, but quickly recovering herself, she withdrew her hand, saying, "Indeed, Lord Danby, I very much regret this avowal of your sentiments towards me."

"Oh, recall that word—regret, Miss Douglas,

for though our acquaintance has been short, let me still hope that in time my devoted affection may induce you to give me a more favourable answer than that I now dread."

"Pray cease, my Lord—indeed you distress me—I never imagined your attentions were more than those of a friend."

"Every one must have divined the nature of those attentions but yourself; and now, dear Miss Douglas, listen, I entreat, to one who has never known what love was till he knew you, and whose whole happiness rests on your reply —give me ever so distant a hope that I may win that hand I would give all I possess to obtain."

"Indeed, Lord Danby, I cannot be ever more to you than a friend, flattered, as I feel, by your preference for me—but it is impossible—my feelings will not change."

"Then," cried he, turning very pale, "my worst forebodings are verified—you love another?"

Blanche blushed crimson, and rising, said, "I know not by what right Lord Danby presumes to question my feelings."

"Oh forgive me, Miss Douglas—I meant not to offend—but have some pity on this bitter disappointment to all my long-cherished hopes, and at least do not discard me as a friend, though you will not now listen to me as a lover. I can never, while life lasts, cease to be deeply interested in one to whom I would have devoted that life, if permitted."

But Blanche, hearing footsteps in the hall, fled hastily through another door, and sought her own room.

It is always a painful thing for a woman to refuse any man, but doubly so when that man has qualities to command esteem and admiration; and Blanche now devoutly wished Lord Danby had never been known to her, or that she had been spared the necessity of inflicting pain on one so truly estimable. Little did she think, at that very moment, how agonizing were the feelings of that dear one for whom she had rejected him; but we must now relate what caused Beauchamp to feel thus.

It so happened that he arrived at the Priory about ten minutes after Lord Danby, and giving his horse to a servant in the stable-yard, walked

round to the hall door. In doing so, he passed the drawing-room window, and a glance into the room revealed to his astonished sight Lord Danby sitting on the sofa with Blanche and holding her hand in his. Beauchamp's brain was almost on fire at the sight—he rushed back into the stable-yard, seized his horse from the astonished groom, who was taking him into the stable, and with a look of fury in his eyes rode rapidly away. At the lodge-gates he met Malcolm, who exclaimed, "Why, Beauchamp, what on earth is the matter? you look scared and pale as death—my dear fellow, what has happened?"

"You have deceived me, Lord Malcolm, and brought me here to be insulted—scorned—disgraced—not five minutes since have I seen Blanche Douglas sitting on the sofa with Lord Danby's hand in hers. Let me pass," as Malcolm attempted to detain him; "fool—idiot though I have been, that sight has crazed—has maddened me!"

"For heaven's sake, stop one moment, Beauchamp—on my honour, I have not deceived you," exclaimed Malcolm—but he was gone, riding furiously towards home.

Malcolm returned instantly to the house, and sought Blanche in the drawing-room; she was not there. He then ran up stairs, calling her name loudly. In a moment she appeared from her room.

"What do you want Charles?" she asked.

"Quick, Blanche, one word only,—have you accepted Lord Danby?"

"Oh, Charles! how can you ask me such a question?"

"On your life—your honour,—answer me truly—without evasion—have you positively, unconditionally refused him?"

"On my honour, Charles, yes; but what makes you ask me so vehemently?"

"Because Beauchamp has been here, saw you sitting with your hand in his, and the sight has driven him distracted; but I must be gone this moment and follow him, or I know not what he may do in his excited state."

Malcolm rushed from the house, and mounting his horse, which his servant held at the door, galloped instantly away to overtake his friend. Mrs. Gordon, who was returning from her poultry-yard, alarmed at the furious galloping of

horses up the carriage drive, entered the house hastily and enquired of the footman what it meant, and who had been calling there.

"The Marquis of Danby, ma'am, has been here and is just gone. Mr. William Beauchamp rode into the yard, and left his horse, but before it could be put into the stable, he returned and took him from John's hand, and rode off as fast as he could go. My Lord has also ridden full gallop up to the Lodge."

"What can have happened, Thomas?" asked Mrs. Gordon, anxiously.

"Nothing that I know of, ma'am; but John said Master William was in a terrible way about something, and looked like a ghost."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon; "but where is Miss Douglas?"

"In her own room, I believe, ma'am," and immediately Mrs. Gordon rushed up-stairs, and found Blanche in an agony of grief.

"My own child," (throwing her arms round her niece), "what on earth has happened? what is the meaning of all I heard about Lord Danby, Beauchamp, and Malcolm riding so furiously away, and you in tears too; dear Blanche, pray

tell me what has caused this dreadful commotion."

"Dear, dear aunt," replied Blanche, crying bitterly, "I am the unfortunate cause of all."

Blanche then related what had occurred between herself and Lord Danby, and that Beauchamp having, on passing the window, seen him take her hand, rode away, as her cousin told her, in a distracted state, refusing to stop or listen to him a moment, and that Charles, learning the truth from her own lips, immediately followed him, fearing he might commit some rash act.

"May Heaven avert such a calamity, my dear child," exclaimed Mrs. Gordon; "but pray, do not give way thus; we can trust Charles, and, oh! how fortunate he was here."

"Indeed, dear aunt, I should never forgive myself were anything to befall poor William, for I fear I may have treated Lord Danby in too friendly a manner, as we all liked him so much; but, until yesterday, I never thought he intended more than common attention to me, and indeed, dear aunt, this morning he was so suddenly announced, that I could not escape from the

room, though, after what you told me yesterday, I had resolved never to be left alone with him again."

"My dear love, do not distress yourself so, it could not be avoided, and I hope Charles will prevail on William to return."

Fast as Lord Malcolm rode, and he slackened not his speed for a moment, Beauchamp far outstripped him, and having put his horse in the stable, ordered a fresh one to be saddled immediately, going up the back stairs to his room, where, having packed up a carpet bag, he sat writing a few hasty lines to his father, explaining what had taken place, and his intention of leaving home for a short time. When Malcolm bursting open the door, exclaimed, "Beauchamp, why this folly—this madness? Danby has proposed, and is rejected!—how could you think Blanche would act otherwise?"

"On your honour, Malcolm, is this true?"

"On my life, it is; Blanche has told me all; that, urging his suit, he seized her hand for a moment, but that she immediately withdrew it, and positively refused his addresses."

Beauchamp stood as if electrified, his lips and

frame quivering with agitation, and then sunk back into a chair, overpowered by conflicting sensations.

"Here, Beauchamp," said Malcolm, pouring out a glass of water, "drink this, my dear fellow, all is well, believe me, and now you must return to poor dear Blanche, who is almost broken-hearted, fearing you have left her for ever."

"Oh, Malcolm! the agony of that moment, I thought my heart would burst, and now see how my hand trembles—I am quite bewildered still."

"Then come with me, my dear Beauchamp, a glass of wine first, and then our horses."

"I cannot go just yet, Malcolm, my head throbs so."

"The air will revive you, Beauchamp, so come along directly;" and taking his friend's arm, Malcolm led him down stairs, and having forced him to drink a glass of wine, they mounted their horses; Beauchamp rode by his friend's side, who was like a man in a trance, from which Malcolm could not rouse him; but when they reached the Priory, seeing Blanche at the little morning-room window, with her

handkerchief in her hand, Malcolm exclaimed, "There is that dear girl still crying; can you doubt her now?"

In an instant Beauchamp rushed into the room, and folding her in his arms, burst into tears; "Thank heaven for those tears," said Malcolm; "now, dear Blanche, they will relieve him."

Leaving the lovers together, Malcolm took his aunt into the drawing-room, and told her the state in which he found Beauchamp. "In short, dear aunt, he has received a dreadful shock, and I feared at first his brain was seriously affected. We must do all now to soothe and comfort him." The interview between Blanche and Beauchamp was most affecting; but she, seeing his prostrate state of mind, was the first to rouse herself, and rally him on his want of faith in her attachment.

"My own dearest treasure," replied Beauchamp, "I deserve every reproach you can heap upon my head, but if you knew only half what I have suffered since the ball and dinner party at Sir Lionel's, and hearing the frequent remarks made by others, you would indeed pity, rather

than condemn me, for believing you had mistaken the true nature of your feelings towards me ; but forgive all my jealous, unjust suspicions ; I will never again listen to such false reports."

Aunt Gordon, thinking too much excitement might be injurious, now made her appearance, saying in a cheerful voice, " Well, Blanche, I hope you have given William a thorough good scolding ; but the luncheon is on the table, and after that, you must really take a walk this fine day, having been sitting in the house all the morning."

Beauchamp was unable to eat anything, which Mrs. Gordon remarking, poured him out a glass of wine. " Why, my dear boy, you look quite wretched, with that pale, wan face ; pray take something, if only a biscuit ; and mind, my love, you have a good long walk afterwards, to give him an appetite for his dinner."

" I fear, dear aunt, I cannot dine with you to-day."

" I fear, dear William, you must," was the playful reply ; " and as you are so dainty, I shall order a couple of my spring chickens to be dressed especially for you."

"Then I must send to let my father and Constance know I do not dine at home."

"Oh yes, of course," replied Malcolm, "and I shall go over and dine at Bampton in your place, my boy, and make love to Constance all the evening, as you were in such a state this morning I could not speak a word to her."

After luncheon, Malcolm again mounted his horse, to allay the old Squire's apprehensions about his son, not doubting the servants had noticed his very excited manner; and Beauchamp with Blanche strolled out together for a walk, and did not return until nearly five o'clock, so agreeably passed the time that they were scarcely aware of the lateness of the hour. It would be difficult to point out the happiest of those three persons, who after dinner drew round to the fireside at the Priory that evening. Mrs. Gordon, being in high spirits, could not forbear joking Beauchamp on his jealousy.

"Why, William, at this rate, you will be in a lunatic asylum within a week of Blanche's first appearance at Almaeks; you really must school yourself to meet these things with complacency, if not with indifference; for Blanche

will undoubtedly attract many admirers, (irrespective of her fortune) and she cannot prevent people falling in love with her, or proposing."

"Indeed, dear aunt, I feel more and more every day how undeserving I am of her preference, and that feeling makes me wretched; she is so far, so very far beyond my deserts, that I know I have no right to aspire to that dear hand, which I dread sometimes to think can never be mine."

"Never, dear William, believe me," replied Blanche, "shall this hand," placing it in his, "belong to any other than yourself; titles, rank, honours are nothing to me, in comparison with your love. Oh! William, don't again doubt my entire devotion to yourself, or you will, indeed, make me miserable."

"Heaven bless you, my own darling girl, for that avowal," as he raised her hand to his lips, and the tears started to his eyes from uncontrollable emotion.

"Come, come, my dear boy," said Mrs. Gordon, "your nerves are sadly shattered by this morning's work; pray, do not torment yourself any more in this foolish manner."

"I *will not* go to London, aunt," added Blanche, "unless William goes too; and to save him any anxiety, I had rather not go at all."

"Well, dear child, no one can oblige you to go, unless you like it; so we will say no more on the subject. And now, William, I hope you will not be sparing of your visits to the Priory for the future; and to make up for your bad conduct, I expect you will come over here at least two or three days in the week, if not oftener."

"You will, I fear, dear aunt, be sooner tired of my company than I shall be of yours; as I have promised this dear girl to be here as often as possible."

"I am delighted to hear it, William; so now take another glass of wine, and we will then go to the ladies or the drawing-room, and Blanche shall sing a few songs to enliven us."

It was a late hour before Beauchamp could tear himself away from her he loved so enthusiastically; when, after folding her once more in a long and fervent embrace, invoking every blessing on her head, and then pressing aunt

Gordon's hand to his lips, he bade them both good night.

"Dear, kind, affectionate boy!" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, when he left the room, "who could fail to love you, even though ten times more jealous than you are?"

"Oh, dear aunt, you do not, cannot know how dearly I do love him."

"Indeed, my darling girl, I do believe it, and heaven grant you may ever love him as now, or, poor fellow, I believe he would never survive a change."

"Never, dearest aunt, shall he find any change in me."

"I do not fear it, my love; so now let us go to our rooms and thank the Almighty that the day which began in trouble has ended in happiness to us all."

CHAPTER XIII.

We must now turn to Lord Danby, who felt most acutely the sudden overthrow of his fondly cherished and too sanguine hopes, and whose disappointment was in proportion to his highly wrought expectations. Many women, more beautiful, more highly accomplished, more fascinating in manner, of high rank and of great wealth, had Lord Danby encountered in his short intercourse with the world, who had excited his passing admiration, without awakening any deeper emotion; but until the night of the Hunt ball, he had never met with one who realized his ideas of perfect loveliness. The unstudied

elegance of mien and manner—the soft, angelic countenance of Blanche Douglas, lit up by those sparkling eyes, so innocently expressive of her artless, unsophisticated mind, presented to Lord Danby's imagination, if not absolutely to his sight, that vision he had so long cherished in his heart, of perfection in woman. Whenever she moved, his eyes instinctively, irresistibly, followed; and after having danced two quadrilles with her, he was as much taken with her guileless remarks, gentle disposition, light, buoyant spirits and cheerful conversation, from which there was a total absence of either levity or satire, as he had been at first sight with her person; and from that night her image was the constant companion of his thoughts, and ever present day and night. Even in rejecting his proposals that day, she was lovely still; so grieved to inflict pain, so anxious to spare those bitter feelings she seemed by intuition to know he must feel, when obliged to crush by one word all his deeply indulged, fondly cherished hopes of happiness. "Oh, Blanche, Blanche!" ejaculated Lord Danby, as he spurred forward from the Lodge gates, which so short a time before he had

entered cheerful and happy; "all I possess in the world, rank, honours, and riches, would I resign; all, all,—everything, for that most precious to me of all earthly treasures—your dear hand. But it cannot be—not now at least—if ever! She loves, I fear, another—and that man is William Beauchamp. It must be so, and Harcourt has deceived me." Indulging in such melancholy reflections, Lord Danby reached Barton Court, and immediately repaired to his own room, where, when feeling more composed, he sat down and wrote a few lines to Mr. Harcourt, expressive of his feelings of unfeigned sorrow and most poignant grief in having that morning failed to interest Miss Douglas in his favour; although acknowledging her kind consideration in endeavouring to spare him as much as possible the pain of a refusal.

Having dispatched this letter by his servant to Throseby, Lord Danby sought Sir Lionel, and made known his intention of leaving Barton Court the following morning, alleging as his excuse for curtailing his visit that an unexpected event required his immediate return home. Lord Danby's communication excited no little

surprise and no trifling indignation on the part of Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt, who, attributing Blanche's refusal of such an unexceptionable offer to Mrs. Gordon's influence over her, in favour of Beauchamp, drove over in hot haste to the Priory, vowing vengeance, and resolving to insist on Blanche being restored to their protection.

Mrs. Gordon was sitting alone at her work in the drawing-room (Malcolm and Blanche having ridden over to Bampton), when Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt pounced in upon her, and with scarcely the usual civility of shaking hands, the gentleman rushed "*in medias res*," or in plainer terms, was *at her* without circumlocution, boiling to deliver himself of his angry thoughts.

"So, Mrs. Gordon, I find you have persuaded your niece to reject the Marquis of Danby; a young nobleman of unblemished character, large fortune, and heir to a dukedom! What fault could you find with him, Mrs. Gordon? He is handsome, most amiable in disposition, (Sir Lionel and all his family speak in raptures of his lordship) and agreeable, in short perfectly unexceptionable in every respect. But I suppose it did not suit *your views* that my ward should

accept his lordship; and therefore her prospects in life are to be sacrificed that you may carry out you own plans."

"My plans! Mr. Harcourt," exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, unable to contain her indignation any longer, "how dare *you* accuse *me* of planning! you and your friend, Lord Mervyn, are planners, and very creditable plans you devise between you. I persuade my niece to reject Lord Danby! I scorn the imputation, sir, and throw it back, as a base, untrue, unmanly assertion. My influence never has been, and never shall be exercised like yours, in inducing her to marry *any* man; neither have I been instrumental in her refusal of Lord Danby; and I say, without fear of contradiction, in which I shall be fully confirmed by his lordship, that he has received from me every facility for improving his acquaintance with my niece since he has been in this neighbourhood. From the day we dined at Sir Lionel Markham's, Lord Danby has had the *entrée* of my house at all times; Lord Malcolm and myself have treated him with the greatest kindness, from his being previously known to Charles; he has dined here very frequently; has

often seen Blanche alone, when I have been out or otherwise engaged; in short, we all liked him so much and thought so highly of him, that latterly his visits were made without the least formality, and he was received on the footing of a friend. These are plain facts, Mr. Harcourt; and had I any intention, or any reason whatever, to prejudice Blanche against Lord Danby, or throw any obstacle in his way, it is quite needless for me to say, orders might have been given to my servants to refuse him admittance; and last of all, when he called yesterday, and proposed to Blanche, I was quite unaware of his having been here, until some time after he had left the house."

"It appears most extraordinary to me," replied Mrs. Harcourt, "quite inexplicable, how Blanche could refuse such a person as Lord Danby."

"And so you thought before, Mrs. Harcourt, when she refused Lord Vancourt; preferring to be guided by her own feelings instead of listening to your advice; and fortunate indeed, poor girl! for her, that she summoned resolution enough to think and act for herself. In this

instance she has done the same thing, and feeling no deeper regard for Lord Danby upon so short an acquaintance, she of course declined his proposal. There is nothing very extraordinary in such conduct, unless you can shew that my niece is under the imperious necessity of accepting any nobleman who proposes, whether she likes him or not."

"I should like to know," retorted Mrs. Harcourt, "how often your favourite, Mr. Beauchamp, has been here lately?"

"Without keeping an exact register of all persons who call at the Priory," replied Mrs. Gordon, "I think I may safely say that since the ball he has called twice, and dined here once only; therefore his presence cannot have operated as a counterfoil to Lord Danby, who has had the field quite open to the prosecution of his addresses, without the slightest intervention from any other person whatever; and I may add that, guessing his lordship's intentions from his very frequent visits, I pointed out to Blanche the advantages of such an alliance, and his many good qualities, leaving it entirely to her own feelings to accept him or not."

"Oh, indeed! Mrs. Gordon; but pray, where is Blanche, as we wish very much to see her?"

"She is out riding with her cousin," was the reply.

The Harcourts rose soon after and took their leave, seeing no grounds for further altercation with Mrs. Gordon, who had so completely turned the tables on them.

As the time fixed for holding the assizes drew near, Blanche became exceedingly nervous, requiring all Beauchamp's tenderness and encouragement to strengthen her for the coming trial, and every hour he could spare was devoted to her.

"Oh, William!" she exclaimed one day, when they were walking arm-in-arm in the garden; "I have such a dread of appearing in court that I wish Charles would give up all further proceedings, and let the matter rest as it is. Will you ask him to do so, as he will not listen to me?"

"My dearest girl, you know I would do any thing to spare your feelings; but you must consider, if the trial is prevented taking place, your fair name will be tarnished for ever, and

people will say you consented to elope with Lord Vancourt; this will be undoubtedly the opinion of the world, and the reflections cast upon your character for such an act will follow you through life. Would you consent to lie under such an imputation, merely to avoid a little unpleasantry for a few minutes? as you have little more to depose to than your honour and surprise at Lord Vancourt's attempt to hurry you off."

"If not for my own sake, yet for yours, dear William, must I summon then all my courage, as no reflections shall ever be cast on your wife, which I now consider myself to be, in the sight of heaven, having vowed never to marry another, if it pleases the Almighty to spare our lives until that event takes place."

"My own dearest Blanche, on my account you shall never be subjected to one moment's inquietude, which it may be in my power to prevent. The world is nothing to me. I care neither for its favours nor its frowns; it is for yourself only I am thinking, should any unfortunate circumstances prevent our union; for without Mrs. Harcourt's consent, I cannot claim your hand until two long years have elapsed;

and how many things may happen in that time to dash the cup of happiness from my lips!"

"Nothing, William, but the hand of death can ever prevent me fulfilling my engagement to you, although I fear you will never believe me sincere in this so oft-expressed determination. Oh, would that you could read every secret feeling of my heart, which beats for you only! indeed, indeed, dear William, your doubts and suspicions make me very miserable; for three long weeks, day after day, hour after hour, I sat wondering why you never came, watching and hoping that the sound of every horse I heard approaching might be yours. Oh, had you come as usual, I had been spared that unpleasant scene with Lord Danby, and you the agony of believing for one moment that I could prefer him or any other human being to yourself."

"Dear, dear Blanche, pray spare me those bitter reflections which my past conduct calls up; but, indeed, I could not help thinking from what occurred at the ball, and afterwards at Barton Court, when you were sitting so long with Lord Danby, and so evidently pleased

with his society, that his attentions must be most agreeable to you; and it was on that account solely, and lest my presence might influence you, or deter him from an expression of his sentiments, that I absented myself so long from the Priory."

"Well, dear William, you do not now, I hope, believe that I ever intended any thing more than common civility to Lord Danby; but to convince you of my unswerving attachment to yourself, here is a little present which I had purchased expressly for your own hand, within this last week,"—producing a beautiful diamond ring, with a small lock of her hair inside,—"and which you must wear as a symbol of my love. Come, give me your hand—I shall place it myself on your finger, and when I cease to be your own dear Blanche, as you so often call me, then return this ring to me again."

"That you will never cease to be to me, my own sweet girl," pressing her to his heart; "and now, dear Blanche, see that I also had prepared a similar present for yourself, which I had intended giving you after the hunt ball; and now I must examine which finger it will fit best."

"Place it where you would my wedding-ring, dear William; and now, with my hand in yours, by that token I pledge my faith to you. Dear William, will that pledged promise satisfy your jealous, unjust suspicions? and will you from this hour promise never to doubt more your own dear Blanche?"

"Yes, dear girl, that promise I give most cheerfully, and trust to observe most faithfully; but, believe me, without any desire to extenuate my own conduct, true, devoted affection cannot exist without some jealousy; and now tell me, were I to pay great attention to any pretty girl by dancing with her two or three times on the same night, and sitting with her apart from the other company, when meeting at dinner or other parties,—were I also, in addition to these little acts of attention, to be frequently calling at her father's house, and monopolising her society as much as I conveniently could,—would you not, dear girl, experience some little uneasy sensations at my conduct, and begin with good cause to doubt the sincerity of my professed undivided regard for yourself?"

"Unquestionably I should, William; but with

a full knowledge of your meaning, and seeing how you intend to apply it, the case between us is not exactly parallel. Gentlemen have the option of paying any such attentions, which ladies have not the option of declining sometimes, without apparent rudeness, and where no necessity exists for shewing it, particularly to those whose behaviour is courteous and their society agreeable; but surely, my dear William, there is a very wide distinction between being pleased with a person and being in love with him; and it would be great vanity in a girl to suppose that every man, who tries to make himself agreeable, must necessarily be in love with her."

"Not so very wide a distinction, dear girl, as the one often leads to the other, and men certainly consider these smiling receptions of their attentions as an encouragement to proceed further."

"Then you gentlemen, William, are very vain, unreasonable animals, for girls, if distant or reserved in their manners, are accused of hauteur, stupidity, or ill temper; and if socially disposed,

of flirting, or leading you to imagine they are more seriously affected."

"Well, dear Blanche, it is, I conclude, rather a difficult matter for young ladies to draw the line of distinction; but you have seen two instances of men's vanity and unreasonableness in the conduct of Vernon and Lord Danby, who both aspired to your hand without your having given them, as you believe, any just or reasonable grounds for thinking that you accepted their devoirs in any other light than mere politeness; so you must perceive, my dear girl, that my opinion of men's feelings in such cases is tolerably correct, and I would only suggest, to spare yourself the unpleasantness of similar scenes in future, a more guarded and reserved manner towards any man who shows you any unusual attentions, unless you really mean to encourage his addresses."

"Then, Mr. Will, I suppose I must appear as demure as a Quakeress in society; neither smile, nor look pleased, scarcely speak, and consent to be set down as a most stupid, dull girl, without two ideas in my head, and treat all men alike, whether agreeable or the reverse, merely

to avoid the possibility of their falling in love with me; really, if men are such foolish, sensitive creatures, they must take care of themselves; but I rather suspect the majority are not very scrupulous in trying to win the affections of unsuspecting girls, without intending anything more."

"It is quite true, dear girl, that men of the world care no more about breaking girls' hearts than they do about breaking their fans, and such deserve no mercy; but I am perfectly satisfied my dear Blanche will never encourage flirtations with men of this description."

"So you really can repose some little confidence in me, after all your lecturing, Mr. William?"

"Yes, Blanche, I do, indeed, believe you incapable of wilfully misleading any one; and as you know the happiness or misery of my future life now rests in your keeping, you will not, I am convinced, think lightly of that trust which from this hour is so implicitly confided in you; and if I am a little jealous sometimes, set it down to the right account,—my sole, undivided love and anxious solicitude about one who is,

and ever must be, far dearer to me than my own life. And now, dear girl, let us return to aunt Gordon, who, I dare say, begins to think we have been a most unreasonable time love-making this morning."

"Well, children," remarked that lady, "your delightful little topic appears quite inexhaustible."

"My dear aunt," replied Blanche, laughing, "you are greatly deceived in thinking William has been talking love to me all this time, whereas he has been giving me a most severe lecture on flirtation; in fact, dear aunt, his speeches are often the reverse of romantic, pathetic, or even complimentary."

"So much the better, my love; it is the greatest proof that he has formed a high and true estimate of your own good sense. The silly trash talked by most lovers is perfectly sickening, and I never thought William would pour into your ears such fulsome, unmeaning stuff, which even a child of twelve years old might feel ashamed of listening to."

"There is no fear of that, dear aunt; only

just give him a hint not to lecture me quite so much for the future."

"Return the compliment, my love, as he requires some sharp admonitions on his weak point—jealousy. And now, I want you both to assist me in the conservatory."

CHAPTER XIV.

On the morning of the trial, the court was crowded to excess by well-dressed persons of both sexes, attracted by the novelty of the case and the strong feeling excited in the neighbourhood against the perpetrators of this daring outrage. Lord Vancourt did not, of course, appear, being still on his travels, nobody knew where, not even Lord Mervyn; but one of the leading counsel was employed (everybody said by his lordship, *sub rosa*) to defend his two late underkeepers or night watchers, who had remained prisoners ever since the commission of the offence; the wounded man, now in a fair

way of recovery, having turned king's evidence. One of the most talented as well as gentlemanly men at the bar, named Whalley, had been retained by Malcolm to conduct the prosecution; the sharp-witted, brow-beating Serjeant Wrangler appeared for the defence.

Mr. Whalley, in his opening address to the jury, commented in severe terms upon the monstrous nature of the offence, by which the lives of two persons had been nearly sacrificed, characterising it also as one of the most violent, wanton, and disgraceful outrages attempted by any man professing to be a gentleman.

The first person called to prove the assault and attempted abduction was Blanche Douglas, who entered the court attended by her aunt Gordon and Lord Malcolm; and her counsel, pitying her extreme agitation on entering the witness-box, merely asked a few questions as to Lord Vancourt's attempts to drag her from the carriage, and her previous rejection of his addresses. Having thanked her for her replies, Mr. Whalley said it was unnecessary for him to trouble her further, and was resuming his seat, when Serjeant Wrangler immediately rose,

and addressing poor Blanche, who was turning to leave her unpleasant position, apologised in the blandest manner, and in the softest tone he could assume, for detaining her from her friends a few minutes longer.

"You were acquainted, I believe, Miss Douglas, with Lord Vancourt some time previously to this unfortunate affair on Marston Common?"

"A very short time only, sir," was the reply.

"You met his lordship, I think, first at Marston Castle, where you were staying on a visit to Lord and Lady Mervyn?"

"Yes," was the faint response.

"You found him, I dare say, as others have, a very agreeable, entertaining companion, extremely courteous and deferential to ladies, and in no wise forward or presuming in their society?"

No answer being returned, Serjeant Wrangler paused a moment, directing a smiling, self-satisfied look at the jury, to attract their attention to this admission in his favour, adjusting, at the same time, his gown with the air of counsel when confident of success.

"Confound that knave!" whispered Malcolm to Mrs. Gordon, "he will lead that timorous, unsuspecting girl into admissions which will play the devil with us, and herself also; but stay here a moment, aunt, whilst I hand a line or two to Whalley," which he wrote on the crown of his hat, and the next moment a little cramped note was handed up on the point of a stick by Malcolm's attorney to his counsel, which being read, was answered by a nod of the head. Serjeant Wrangler was meanwhile attempting to improve the case by other exactions.

"There's no doubt, Miss Douglas, you felt pleased and gratified, perhaps something more, by the polite attentions of this handsome, highly-gifted young nobleman?"

"My lord," exclaimed Whalley, suddenly rising before his opponent's question could be answered, "I object to that question and the course of cross-examination adopted by my learned friend, who is trying to obtain admissions from Miss Douglas, which, from her youth and inexperience of practice in law courts, will be used to her disadvantage; and I must caution

her not to notice these impertinent insinuations."

"The last question," said the judge, "was scarcely fair, Mr. Wrangler; conveying an inference which you had no right to make."

"I bow to your decision, my lord," replied Wrangler, no wise disconcerted by this rebuke. "I can easily obtain my point in another way."

This little altercation, however, had opened Blanche's eyes and understanding as to what Mr. Serjeant Wrangler was aiming at; and the spirit of the Douglases came to her rescue, to retort upon her crafty interrogator.

"You were in the habit, Miss Douglas, I believe, when at Marston Castle, of frequently driving and walking alone with Lord Vancourt?"

"No, I was not," answered Blanche, in a firm voice, which was distinctly audible in the court.

"Bravo! Miss Blanche," shouted a voice from the crowd near the door, "give it the rascally lawyer in turn."

"I beg pardon, Miss Douglas," continued her tormentor; "but we have evidence to prove you were seen several times walking alone with his lordship."

"Twice only—when invited to take a walk by Miss Mervyn, I was left alone, as I believed, purposely, to Lord Vancourt's attentions, which being disagreeable to me, I never again accompanied Miss Mervyn in her walks."

"Still, Miss Douglas, notwithstanding Lord Vancourt's attentions being, as you state, so disagreeable, you accepted him as a partner at the Cherrington Ball, not for one only, but for two quadrilles; and dancing twice the same evening, with the same partner, is generally considered a very particular favour."

"I accepted Lord Vancourt for the second dance in obedience to my aunt Mrs. Harcourt's commands, and most certainly contrary to my own inclination, being previously engaged to Major Hammond for that set."

"Well, Miss Douglas, we, who cannot enter into the fancies and feelings of young ladies, must judge by their acts, and I should certainly consider it an act of encouragement in any lady accepting me twice for a partner. Mammas and aunts are very convenient personages sometimes to fall back upon."

Blanche feeling too indignant to make any

reply to this impertinent inuendo, Serjeant Wrangler, with another significant look at the jury, proceeded :—

"It was only two days after this ball at Cherrington, when you danced twice with him, that Lord Vancourt wrote a formal proposal for your hand, Miss Douglas; and I can scarcely imagine that his lordship, a thorough man of the world, moving in the highest circles, well acquainted with the etiquette and forms generally observed on such occasions, and, as you admit, most courteous and deferential to ladies—neither forward nor presuming—would have committed such an act of folly as making a proposal for a young lady, unless fully satisfied in his own mind that he had good grounds for believing his offer would be accepted."

"I never gave Lord Vancourt," replied Blanche indignantly, "the slightest encouragement in any way, having taken a dislike to him from the first; but, as an acquaintance of my aunt Harcourt, I could not behave rudely to him whilst I was living under her protection at Throseby."

"Oh! of course not, Miss Douglas!" added Wrangler, with a sneer. "The letter addressed

to your guardian, Mr. Harcourt, by Lord Vancourt, containing the proposal, was, I presume, submitted to your perusal, and the answer which was returned?"

"No, sir. I neither saw nor knew the contents of the letter written by my guardian in reply; but, when asked by my aunt what answer should be returned, I told her most distinctly that nothing should ever induce me to accept the addresses of Lord Vancourt."

"Very strange, Miss Douglas, when Mr. Harcourt's letter appears to me to warrant our arriving at the very opposite conclusion."

"I shall prove, sir," exclaimed Mr. Whalley, suddenly starting up, "by another witness, that Miss Douglas did, positively and unconditionally, refuse Lord Vancourt's proposals; and also the base, nefarious plot concocted at Mervyn Castle to impose such a worthless person as Lord Vancourt upon an artless, unsuspecting young lady; —into which, I am sorry to add, Miss Douglas's guardian was unwittingly dragged by the false representations made to him there of Lord Vancourt's high character and large fortune; the

latter, no doubt, of great weight with guardians generally."

During this short address, Serjeant Wrangler sat down; and Mr. Whalley, politely apologising to Miss Douglas for the annoyance she had experienced from her cross-examination, said she was now at liberty to rejoin her friends. Poor Blanche, as soon as handed down by Malcolm from the witness-box to a seat below, occupied by her aunt and Constance, overcome by the excessive heat of the court, as well as overpowered by her outraged feelings, fell into a swoon, from which Malcolm and Mrs. Gordon were attempting to rouse her, when Beauchamp, (followed by Stiles and young Hazel,) sprang to her relief.

Without a moment's hesitation, and before Malcolm could guess his intentions, the fainting form of Blanche Douglas was quickly raised in Beauchamp's arms, (the two bold yeomen making way for his advance) carried out of court, and placed on a sofa in the magistrates' waiting-room.

"Quick, neighbour Hazel," cried Stiles, "for a jug of cold water, whilst I throw up the windows."

Blanche, unconscious of what had occurred, soon revived by the cold air and still colder water applied to her forehead and face, and Mrs. Gordon's carriage being in waiting, she was driven immediately home to the Priory, accompanied by her aunt and Constance; Malcolm and Beauchamp being obliged to return to the court.

The next witness called by Mr. Whalley was Alice Hayward, Blanche's maid.

"You went with your young mistress, I believe, to Marston Castle, in the month of —— last?"

"Yes, sir."

"You saw Lord Vancourt there, I conclude?"

"Yes, sir—several times."

"So that you would be sure to know him again?"

"Oh, yes; he was a very particular-looking gentleman."

"Was he very particular in his attentions to your young lady, Miss Douglas?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Did she ever go out walking or driving with him alone?"

"No, sir; Miss Blanche would never dream of doing such a thing with a stranger."

"With whom then did she generally set out for a walk?"

"With Miss Mervyn, sir, accompanied sometimes by Lord Vancourt and Mr. Vernon."

"Did Miss Douglas ever allude to these walks on returning to her room?"

"Yes, sir; the day before we left the Castle, she told me she felt so annoyed by Miss Mervyn and Mr. Vernon's conduct, in leaving her purposely, as she believed, twice alone with Lord Vancourt, that she would never walk with her again."

"Did she keep to this resolution?"

"Yes, sir; the next morning, when Miss Mervyn entered her room, asking her to walk, she pleaded a bad head-ache, and would not go down stairs till Mrs. Harcourt's carriage came to the door to take us home."

"Did Miss Douglas ever make any other remarks to you about Lord Vancourt?"

"She said, the night before she quitted Marston Castle, that she was very glad that their visit was finished; that although entertaining

sometimes, she had taken a great dislike to Lord Vancourt, and hoped never to meet him again."

"Do you remember anything particular occurring two days after the ball at Cherrington?"

"Yes, sir; after luncheon, Miss Blanche on that day ran up to her room, and began sobbing and crying as if her heart would break, because Mrs. Harcourt called her an ungrateful girl for refusing Lord Vancourt; 'but I could not marry such a man, Alice, indeed I never would,' she said, 'if aunt Harcourt turned me out of her house for refusing him.' 'No more wouldn't I, my dear young mistress,' said I, 'even to be made a lady of!' Then, the next morning, over comes Mrs. Gordon, and orders me to pack up her things directly, as Miss Blanche shouldn't stop another hour at Throseby, to be worried about that good-for-nothing man, Lord Vancourt, who, I heard her tell Mrs. Harcourt, was no better than he should be."

"Well, Alice," interposed Mr. Whalley, "that will do; now tell me what happened on the night you left the Priory to return to Throseby?"

Alice having related all the adventures on that

occasion, with some comments of her own, was then asked if she could positively swear to Lord Vancourt being the man who attempted to drag her mistress from the carriage; and on this point being most positive, Mr. Whalley said he need not detain her any longer; and Serjeant Wrangler prudently declined preventing her standing down from the witness box.

Robert Conyers, examined by Mr. Whalley:—

"How long have you known Miss Douglas?"

"Since childhood."

"Have you had any opportunities of knowing her true character and disposition?"

"Very many,—having narrowly observed her, from being on very intimate terms with her relatives; and for the last two years she has been more immediately under my own eye, from my instructing her in riding."

"What has been your opinion of her, Mr. Conyers?"

"She has ever been a timid, gentle girl, of a very affectionate but retiring disposition, with strong religious principles."

"You were aware, I believe, of Lord Van-

court being invited to Marston Castle, and Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt's being asked to spend a few days there at the same time, with their ward, Miss Douglas ?"

" I was, sir ; and two days previously to thei leaving Throseby, I warned Miss Douglas of the plot which had been concocted to ensnare her, and the character I had heard of Lord Vancourt, at which she was exceedingly astonished."

" You attended, I believe, the ball at Cherrington, and overheard a conversation between Lord Vancourt and Mr. Vernon there, relative to this attempted abduction ?"

" Yes, I did."

" Did you notice Miss Douglas's behaviour, whilst dancing with Lord Vancourt ?"

" Particularly ; well knowing her dislike to the man ; and the imploring look she cast on me, when he came to claim her hand for the dance, determined me to take my position close to her, whilst dancing with his lordship."

" Thank you, Mr. Conyers ;" and as Whalley sat down, up rose the Serjeant instantly.

" You say, Mr. Conyers, you warned Miss

Douglas of the plot contrived against her, and of Lord Vancourt's character, two days before she went to stay at the castle? I should have thought, sir, the first person you ought to have made acquainted with this pretended plot was Mr. Harcourt, the young lady's guardian?"

"I thought differently, Mr. Serjeant Wrangler; but I directly informed Mrs. Gordon, her other guardian, of all I had heard, to whose discretion I could more safely confide this matter; and from what occurred subsequently, I am quite satisfied that she was the most proper person to be consulted."

"You had good reasons, no doubt, sir, for trying to prevent Miss Douglas marrying Lord Vancourt? you have heard of a friend in need being a friend indeed, and Mr. William Beauchamp is, I am told, a very particular friend of yours?"

"Mr. Beauchamp *is*, sir, I am proud to say, a very particular friend of mine; a man of high principles, honourable feelings, and sound good sense—the latter much needed by Mr. Serjeant Wrangler—for how a learned Barrister could

have laboured, as you have done this day, to prove an absurdity, patent to the commonest understanding, I cannot comprehend; you are striving to prove the consent of Miss Douglas to elope with Lord Vancourt. Now, sir, *giving* you the admission, you try in vain to obtain, that she was a silly girl, caught at first sight by the handsome person of this man, and despising all the warnings she had received of his true character, want of fortune, and lastly, of his actually being a married man, why, what on earth should induce her to elope with him—her guardian consenting to his proposals? for Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt, blind to the revelations made to them, persisted to the last in taking his lordship's part, and the lady almost insisted on her niece marrying him; with these facts clear before you, how can you hope to persuade a child of ten years old, much less twelve men of common sense, that there existed any pretence whatever for Miss Douglas consenting to run away with Lord Vancourt nearly four hundred miles to be married, when she could have been married at the parish church with her guardian's approval? This is all nonsense, Mr. Serjeant

Wrangler, perfectly absurd, and you are wasting the time of the court to no purpose."

"Such is not my opinion, Mr. Conyers; but I do not wish to occupy more of *your* time, which seems so precious to you; nor to be favoured with another long-winded oration, which I have in vain attempted to interrupt."

CHAPTER XV.

THOMAS CARTER next deposed to the conversation he overheard between Vernon and Harley on the evening of the day on which the hounds met at Marston Castle, and having given his evidence, was turning to go down, when Serjeant Wrangler exclaimed:—"Stop, Mr. Carter, I have a word or two to say to you. So, you audacious traitor and eavesdropper, you have had the assurance to swear that you heard all this trumped-up story through a thick mahogany door?"

"Yes, sir, I did—every word of it."

"Then you were in the habit, I conclude, of

always listening at doors, to take some news into the servants' hall?"

"No, sir, I never did it before or since; but hearing the young squire's name mentioned in a loud, angry tone by Mr. Vernon, I thought some mischief was brewing against him, and so stopped to hear what it was."

"And now you are in Lord Malcolm's service, you have determined to make out this cock-and-bull story, which you think sensible men, like the gentlemen of the jury, will believe from a discharged, worthless servant like yourself, who couldn't get a character from your last place."

"I was not discharged, sir, from Lord Mervyn's service, but gave warning to leave, and never asked his lordship for a character."

"No, I should think not, Thomas Carter, as you know well enough you had not the remotest chance of getting one."

"My character is as good as yours," retorted Carter, "any day in the week."

"Get down out of the box, you impudent liar," screamed almost Wrangler; "I won't condescend to ask you another question."

William Beauchamp was then called, who related in a clear, straightforward manner all that passed under his observation on the night of the attempted abduction, for which having been thanked by Mr. Whalley, he was then addressed by the Serjeant.

"Pray, Mr. Beauchamp, will you oblige me by stating from whom you obtained the information which directed you to Marston Common on that night?"

"That question, sir," replied Beauchamp, "I believe you cannot legally insist on my answering, although I should not hesitate in giving a reply to any other counsel except Serjeant Wrangler."

"And why not to me, Mr. Beauchamp?"

"Simply because you have adopted a coarse, bullying manner towards the witnesses placed in this box to-day, to which I give you fair notice I shall not submit."

"I am not responsible to you, Mr. Beauchamp, for the course of examination I choose to pursue towards other witnesses."

"I am not quite sure of that, Mr. Serjeant Wrangler, when you attempt to take away the

character of a poor man whom I have known from boyhood, and whose daily bread depends upon his honesty."

"And do you call Thomas Carter an honest man, to betray his master?"

"Yes, sir, and a virtuous one too, to incur the risk of losing place and character in his attempt to save an innocent girl from a fate worse than death,—from being made the victim of a dark, villainous conspiracy to rob her of her fair name and fortune, and consign her to the power of as unprincipled a scoundrel as ever trod the earth."

A murmur of applause ran through the court at this manly speech, which having subsided, Mr. Serjeant Wrangler continued in a subdued tone, "I did not ask you for the expression of your own particular opinion on this subject, Mr. Beauchamp, with which we are well acquainted, and the motives which suggested your remarks."

"My opinion, sir, will be the opinion of every disinterested person in this court at the conclusion of the trial, and I warn you to address no further impertinent language to myself, or question my motives, or——".

"What, sir?" interrupted Wrangler, now losing his temper; "I may expect a horse-whipping, I suppose?"

"Which would not be the first time," added Beauchamp, "that a well-merited castigation of that kind had been inflicted on the back of Serjeant Wrangler." A burst of laughter followed this announcement, during which the Serjeant fumed and fretted impatiently, showing by his fierce looks and quivering lips the storm raging within his breast; but the cool, determined eye of Beauchamp fixed steadily upon his face, whilst a contemptuous smile curled his upper lip, warned him that he had met his match, and whispering his junior counsel to continue the cross-examination, he sat down, saying he would not submit to these indecorous outbreaks, which were disgraceful to any court of justice.

The junior counsel, Mr. Sweetman, a tall, thin young man, the reverse in appearance and manners to Serjeant Wrangler, then attempted to draw Beauchamp into a confession of being the aggressor in the affray, by first striking Lord Vancourt.

"I was *not* the aggressor, sir," replied Beauchamp in a firm voice; "for Lord Vancourt had seized Miss Douglas by the arm, and was trying to drag her from the carriage when I reached the spot. I then pushed him away, and attempted to shut the carriage-door, upon which, instantly drawing a pistol, he fired at me, the ball grazing my face; and seeing him again trying to draw another pistol from his pocket, it was then, and not till then, that in defence of my own life I shot him through the arm, to disable him from committing further outrage, not to take his life; for had I been so inclined, I could, without doubt, have shot him dead on the spot."

"You appear to have been actuated by a very chivalrous feeling, Mr. Beauchamp, in rushing to the rescue of this young lady,—perhaps I might say by a stronger impulse."

"I was actuated by that spirit, sir, which is dominant in the breast of every true Englishman, to protect a defenceless woman from insult and outrage." Again a cheer arose from the densely crowded court.

"From what occurred, Mr. Beauchamp, after

Miss Douglas quitted the witness-box this day, I think there can be little doubt by what feelings you were really actuated."

"You are now treading on dangerous ground, sir," replied Beauchamp, indignantly, "by presuming to question my motives, or to doubt my words."

"I beg pardon, Mr. Beauchamp, if I have given you offence, and can only say it was not so intended by me."

"There was sufficient cause for my rushing to the rescue of my sister's dearest friend," continued Beauchamp.

"Oh, certainly, Mr. Beauchamp; but evidently the young lady was your friend also, if not something more."

"Then, sir, by your own showing, it is not possible she could have been a consenting party to this projected elopement, which your learned brother has been so fruitlessly attempting to prove."

A sharp tug at his gown brought the young barrister immediately to his seat, Wrangler whispering in his ear, "Sit down, sir, you are playing the devil with our case!"

A triumphant smile played over the features of Mr. Whalley as he inquired of Mr. Sweetman whether he wished to ask Mr. Beauchamp any more questions.

"No, sir," was the curt reply.

Mark Rosier then ascended the witness-box, and gave his evidence in a short, conclusive manner, maintaining the fact of Beauchamp being shot at first by Lord Vancourt, and his being wounded in the side by John Thompson, who had turned king's evidence, identifying also the two prisoners, Harding and Jones, as participators in the affray.

"In fact, sir," said Mark, pointing to a scar under his eye, "this is a little favour from Mr. Harding's cudgel, which'll remind me of that gentleman for some time to come."

"I must trouble you with a few questions, Mr. Rosier," exclaimed Serjeant Wrangler, as he was leaving the box.

"No trouble at all, sir," replied Mark, good humouredly.

"I think, Mr. Rosier, you are a person of that profession which filches pheasants and other game from gentlemen's preserves?"

"And I think, Mr. Serjeant Wrangler," retorted Mark, boldly looking his adversary in the face and mimicking him to the life, "you are a person of that profession which filches money from gentlemen's pockets;" which caused a loud laugh among the crowd.

"How dare you, sir, speak to me in that disrespectful language?" demanded Wrangler, looking red-hot with passion.

"How dare you, sir, accuse me of robbing gentlemen's preserves? I'll make you prove your words, Lawyer Wrangler, trying to take away poor men's characters."

"Will you tell me, Mr. Rosier, that you have never killed game belonging to some gentlemen even now in this court?"

"I won't tell you, sir, whether I have or not, because you ha'n't any right to ask such questions; but I'll answer that to any real gentleman in this court, or out of it, that puts it in a civil way."

"So you pretend to swear, Mr. Rosier, that on this dark night, when a man could scarcely see his hand before his face, you saw Lord

Vancourt fire at Mr. Beauchamp, you being ten yards distant from him."

"I didn't say ten yards, sir, as I wasn't five from the young Squire at the time, and if 'twere as dark again I could have seen the flash in the pan, and which side it come from."

"And how did you know Lord Vancourt so well, Mr. Rosier, as to distinguish him on this dark night from other men?"

"Because I had seen him several times, sir, afore, and he wasn't a man to be mistaken for another."

"Oh, very handsome, I suppose?"

"No, sir, he warn't that to my mind; but a tall, long-legged chap, with a large hook nose, and rat's eyes, with shaggy eyebrows, and black whiskers."

"And pray, Mr. Mark, what was the reward you got from Mr. Beauchamp for preventing this runaway match?"

"Well, sir, I baint quite so sharp a hand as a lawyer to pocket the fee aforehand, and I ha'n't got nothing yet but this scar in the face and a dig in the back from that cowardly valet; and as to Miss Blanche running away with this

long-legged lord, she'd ha' served him in the same fashion, if he hadn't held her arm, as the pretty chambermaid at the King's Head served you last night when you took liberties with her, by giving him a good smack in his face."

Roars of laughter followed, which for some few minutes it was impossible to suppress, and even the grave features of the judge relaxed into a smile.

"I appeal to your Lordship," cried the excited Wrangler, "to commit this witness for contempt of court!"

"Contempt of counsel, you ought to have said, Mr. Serjeant Wrangler," replied the judge; "but if gentlemen of the bar will play with edged tools, they must take the consequences; in such cases, I never interfere."

"Very well, my Lord, then I shall sit down."

The last witness called for the prosecution was the wounded man, John Thomson, who underwent a long cross-examination without his evidence being in the least shaken. His story was too simple and truthful to be contravened. He and his two accomplices received ten pounds each from Lord Vancourt's valet, called François

Le Blanc, to assist his Lordship in carrying off Miss Douglas, and were to receive ten pounds more from the head keeper the next morning, when the job was done, who engaged they should not lose their situations, if found out. He did not know whether Lord Mervyn was privy to the plot or not, and would only say what he knew to be true.

No witness being called for the defence, as Serjeant Wrangler had not one he could trust in cross-examination, the judge then addressed the jury, telling them the case was so exceedingly clear against the prisoners, that it was unnecessary for him to detain them with any remarks upon the evidence; and immediately after, the foreman rising, said they had not a moment's hesitation in returning a verdict of guilty against both prisoners, which was received with loud shouts and waving of ladies' handkerchiefs, and one cheer more from the farmers who thronged the court. When silence was restored, the judge, after a severe lecture to the prisoners on the enormity of the offence in which they had been implicated, and the murderous nature of the assault, by which several

lives had been so nearly sacrificed, sentenced them to two years' imprisonment with hard labour.

Before they were removed from the bar, Lord Malcolm rose, requesting permission to say a few words in mitigation of the sentence just pronounced upon the prisoners, which being conceded, he begged to assure his Lordship that his sole object in commencing this prosecution having been to vindicate his cousin's fair name from any complicity or the shadow of suspicion of being in the remotest degree a consenting party to this pretended elopement with Lord Vancourt, he could derive no satisfaction from the punishment of these men, who were the least guilty.

"Of the principal, my Lord, I can only say, that I think scarcely any punishment would be too severe, and his case is the more aggravated from the vile attempts to cast aspersions on my cousin's character, by endeavouring to prove her capable of falling in love and agreeing to elope with a married man, for as such Lord Vancourt was represented to her and myself before meeting him at the Cherrington ball. From the

first day of his introduction to her at Marston Castle, my cousin entertained a decided antipathy to him, having often told me she felt quite terrified in his presence from the fierce expression of his looks when excited; and I am quite certain, had his character and conduct been unexceptionable, nothing would have induced her to marry Lord Vancourt. I hold in my hand, my Lord, a letter which of itself would prove the concoction of this plot at Marston Castle, written by one of its chief projectors, wholly unsolicited by me (and whose handwriting is well known to many in this court), making a full disclosure of this nefarious scheme. For reasons which your Lordship will understand when seeing the signature, I have forborne to have this letter publicly read in court, but as at once establishing the entire truth of Thomas Carter's evidence, I now submit it to your Lordship's perusal."

The judge having read it carefully through, returned it to Lord Malcolm, saying, "I fully appreciate your honourable motives, Lord Malcolm, in withholding this incontestable proof of the origin of this disgraceful conspiracy,

which fully confirms all Thomas Carter has asserted."

"May I hope, then, my Lord, you will remit a portion of the punishment awarded to the prisoners at the bar, who have both young families depending upon them; and considering that they have already been imprisoned some time, I think six months longer will answer the ends of justice."

"The offence of which they have been convicted is a very serious one, Lord Malcolm, but at your intercession the term shall be abridged."

The two prisoners fell on their knees, expressing their contrition and gratitude to Lord Malcolm for his kindness, who, after thanking the judge, left the court.

CHAPTER XV.

THE hunting season had now drawn to its close, the last appointment made for Bampton House, and invitations sent by the old Squire to all the neighbouring families for a grand dinner party, to conclude with a ball in the evening on the day the hounds met on the lawn for the last day's hunting. With the exception of Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt, whose conduct in reference to their ward since the trial had been severely commented upon, as highly reprehensible, if nothing worse, no excuses were received from any other family, so that the long dining table was crowded with guests, a second table being

laid out for the juniors, at which Fred Beauchamp presided, as many more arrived than were expected; in fact, the hospitality of the old Squire was so unbounded, and his dinner parties so agreeable and devoid of formality, that the heads of families did not scruple to take any friends who might be staying with them at the time.

Constance, supported on one hand by Lord Malcolm, and Sir Lionel on the other, did the honours with her accustomed grace, faced by the old Squire, who divided his attentions between Lady Markham and Mrs. Compton. Will Beauchamp sat between Mrs. Gordon and Blanche, the latter having Captain Markham on her right hand. Gwynne, Conyers, Tyler, Coventry, and others, ranging themselves in order or out of order, without regard to priority or ceremony, with the partners they had selected. Selina, who always felt more at home with the old Squire than in her own house, kept the middle of the table in an uproar by her quaint and witty sayings, which no frowns from Lady Markham could suppress.

"Ah!" she remarked to Conyers, "mamma

may shake her head at me till she shakes it off, Bob, but I am on the right side of the fence to-night, with the old Squire to back me up. But who on earth is that fright of a woman opposite, with a face like a cook?"

"Hush! Selina, that is Mrs. Winterbottom, the wife of that little round-faced, red-nosed man, sitting next Mrs. Compton; a retired brewer, who has lately purchased a large estate lying between the Holt and the forest, so that the Squire was obliged to do the civil thing, and invite him to Bampton, to save the foxes."

"Goodness! what a name, Bob: she may feel very wintry below, but there is more than summer heat above, to judge by those peony-looking cheeks."

Gwynne, who sat next to the lady, seeing the sort of person he had to deal with, kept plying her with champagne every time it was handed round the table, until she exclaimed, "Lorks, Sir Lucius, I feel quite swipey already."

"Oh, never mind," replied Gwynne, ready to burst with suppressed laughter. "Champagne goes for nothing, just puts people into spirits—that's all."

"Heavens, what a woman!" exclaimed Selina in fits of laughter, "*swipey* already! Why, Bob, she will be roaring drunk before dinner is over, and under the table."

"By Jove! Selina, if you run on in this fashion, I must bolt, as I am nearly choked already in bolting my dinner; pray be quiet, can't you?"

"*C'est impossible*, Bob, can't be done. I have set my mind on a regular spree to-night, and suspect my situation before morning will be about the same as Mrs. Featherbottom's—I shall feel *demmed swipey*.—Eh! aw! the Captain looks as if he had swallowed his fork instead of his fish; what does he say, Bob?"

"That you are a deuced deal too bad, Selina, 'pon honour."

"Oh! indeed—perhaps the life-guardsman intends changing Miss Winterbottom into Mrs. Markham—lots of tin, I suppose, with beer and stout gratis."

At this moment, the old Squire, wishing to shew every civility to Mrs. Winterbottom, requested the honour of taking wine with her.

"Why, really, Squire Beauchamp," replied

the lady appealed to, "I mus'n't refuse *you*, I suppose; but my neighbour here, Sir Lucius, has been flushing my glass with champagne, until I am become, as our John says, uncomfortably lushy."

"Then let mere commend," said the Squire, (scarcely able to preserve his gravity during the titters which followed this speech), "a glass of good old sherry, which will set all to rights again."

"I'll take your advice, Squire Beauchamp, as that *wishy-washy* stuff always makes me feel as if I had the cholica mobus."

"Mercy on us!" cried Selina, "that summer-topped woman will be the death of me, Bob; but my lady mamma looks unutterable things, wondering, no doubt, how the old Squire dare ask her to sit at table, with such a person as Mrs. Winterbottom."

"Well, Selina, it can't be helped now, and I daresay my old friend feels uncomfortable enough at such vulgarity; but her better half is passable enough, and the daughter tolerably presentable and good-looking, and a fortune of a hundred thousand pounds (so report goes) will make her a very handsome girl."

"Ay, ay, Bob, money is the magnifying glass; the most plain, disagreeable woman becomes a perfect Houri in the eyes of some men, when bedecked with jewels and lacquered over with gold dust; but what would Will Beauchamp say to Miss Winterbottom, with her hundred thousand pounds!"

"That she might remain Miss Winterbottom to the end of her life for anything he would insinuate to the contrary, Selina; and Bob Conyers is pretty much of the same opinion."

"Glad to hear you say so, Bob, for I began to think you might be caught by a golden hook at last."

"No, no, my dear girl, I shall not make a fool of myself in my old age by marrying a person with whom I could have no community of feelings or ideas, and who does not know a duck from a goose, except on the table; perhaps not there."

"But, Bob, don't you think our funny friend opposite looks rather too much of a chicken about her gills?"

"What can you mean, Selina?"

"Too juvenile about her locks or head gear; don't you understand?—borrowed feathers."

"Oh! I see, wears a wig—gad! it looks very like one; but, by Jupiter! the murder's out," exclaimed he, as one of the footmen, in reaching over Mrs. Winterbottom to place a dish on the table, caught the button of his sleeve in her hair, dragging off her head-dress, and exposing her closely-cropped cranium to view.

"Drat the man!" cried Mrs. Winterbottom, aiming a blow at the astonished footman, which taking effect on Gwynne's nose, nearly knocked him out of his chair.

"What's the fool staring at?" (as he stood for a moment perfectly aghast at the exposure he had occasioned; and then tried to repair the mischief by replacing the head-dress, the back part in front, thereby eliciting renewed laughter). "Let it alone, I say, you stupid oaf!"

And, with a jerk or two on either side, the infuriated lady succeeded in adjusting her attire.

"Ah! miss," she said, addressing Selina, "you may laugh now, but the time will come when you will be glad enough to sail under false

colours, if you don't already, with your pink and white cheeks."

"If I do paint my face, Mrs. Summertop," retorted Selina, "it isn't of one colour, like yours, *red entire*."

"My name isn't Summertop, Miss Imperanse, but Winterbottom."

"Oh, indeed, ma'am—very aristocratic, euphonious name, no doubt, in the frozen regions of Lapland, whence, I conclude, your origin is derived—but the fates defend me from being a Winterbottom—half hot, half cold—or a mermaid in petticoats."

Gwynne, fearing some violent explosion between the now infuriated fair ones, addressed some observation to the excited dame near him, which checked further retorts; and good order once more prevailed, to the great delight of the more staid portion of the company, who began to feel very uncomfortable as to the issue of this combat of words between the two female belligerents.

Beauchamp whispered to Blanche:—"I suspect Bob will have his hands over-full, should he prevail on Selina to become Mrs. Conyers

—poor fellow! he will be ever in hot water, with her cutting speeches—the 'Taming of the Shrew' is nothing in comparison with the work he will have to perform in reducing Selina to anything like orderly conduct."

"She is really very provoking sometimes," replied Blanche; "and says such extraordinary things that strangers must think her a most eccentric person, and very ill-natured; but what would you do, William, with such a wife?"

"I should very soon do without her, Blanche, if by any fatality such a lot could be assigned me."

"You would not feel jealous of her, William, would you?" she inquired, with an arch smile.

"No, my dear; I never could love her sufficiently for that feeling to arise."

"Well, then, I think, Mr. Will, I shall attempt to say smart, sharp things like Selina, to keep flatterers at a distance."

"Reserve and dignity of manners are sufficient repellents, my dear girl, without sarcasm or invective, to which I am quite sure my own dear Blanche, from her naturally gentle disposition, will never have recourse."

"My dear William, you think me a great

deal more perfect than I am; but I must try to keep up to your standard. And, now, as Constance is rising, don't sit too long over your wine, or" (in a whisper,) "get tipsy, *mio caro*."

When the ladies left the room, Sir Lionel rebuked Bob Conyers for not keeping his daughter in better order during dinner.

"Ay, ay, Sir Lionel," retorted Bob, "very pretty, indeed, to lecture me about keeping her in order, after you have been allowing her to run riot all her life at Barton Court; and now, finding her incorrigible, you expect I am to pull her up all at once, like a confirmed runaway horse."

"Well, Conyers, you will always have it that the most mischievous puppies make the best hounds. So, by your own argument, Selina will make a good wife, when she is entered for matrimony."

Leaving the gentlemen to discuss their wine and politics, we will now turn our attention to the ladies.

CHAPTER XVI.

To make amends for Selina's rudeness to Mrs Winterbottom, Constance deemed it incumbent on her to smooth that lady's ruffled feathers by introducing her to Mrs. Gordon and Blanche; and she so far succeeded in restoring her to a more complacent state of mind, when, other company beginning to arrive, her attentions were required elsewhere. Miss Honoria Winterbottom, in addition to very pretty intelligent features, was highly accomplished also, and presented so striking a contrast to her mamma, that few could believe her to be descended from a stock so plebeian; and both Mrs. Gordon and Blanche

were much pleased with her unassuming manners, which, in a great measure, compensated for her mother's great deficiency in those essentials.

As Beauchamp entered the ball-room, his eyes beamed with delight on beholding Blanche Douglas seated by the side of the young stranger, whom he believed she was patronising on his account; and he was advancing towards her, when Captain Markham arrested his progress for a moment.

"Beauchamp, my good fellow, just introduce me to that girl, Miss Winter, will you. Oh! demmit, what a name! eh! ah! unpronounceable; but, 'pon honour, she is a devilish fine girl, notwithstanding that she-dragon of a mother,—they say, lots of tin into the bargain."

"Come on then, Markham." And in a few seconds the lifeguardsman, having made his bow, was parading Miss Honoria round the room, in defiance of the sneers and jesting remarks of his sister, Selina.

On accepting his proffered arm, Beauchamp thanked Blanche for her kind attention to the nameless young lady.

"This I consider, dear girl, as a personal

favour to my father and myself, after Selina's rude behaviour, at dinner, to her mother."

"Really, William, she is a well-educated and highly accomplished girl, speaks French, Italian, and German fluently; and is very unpretending and unaffected."

"I am delighted to find you are pleased with her, dear Blanche, and as they are to be neighbours, we must endeavour to keep on neighbourly terms with the family, however objectionable in some points; which is the usual penalty attached to every Master of Fox-hounds, and in some instances a very disagreeable one. We are obliged to take all fish that come into our net, or within our province—good or coarse alike."

"Well, William, and a very good thing too; or you might have become very proud and haughty, which I suspect you are naturally inclined to be, from that curl of your upper lip, which I have so often noticed when a boy, and I almost dread you will become a tyrant in your old age."

"You have had, dear girl, a fair trial of my temper and disposition, and as the boy is, so will

be the man; his natural inclinations, although disguised from the world, remain unaltered—restrained, but not subdued. No man is born without some failings; mine are as well known to you as myself; and although my best efforts are used to conquer them, they are rebellious subjects still, and will burst forth sometimes into open hostility—therefore, dear girl, pause before it is too late. Danby is, although hasty occasionally, perhaps a better temper than myself—neither jealous nor captious, and will, no doubt, make an excellent husband. But in high-life, where frequently the wife goes one way, and her husband the other, there is little opportunity for conjugal differences to arise. The Marchioness of Danby will have her own establishment of servants and carriages—her box at the opera—go where she likes, and do as she pleases, without consulting her lord's wishes—indeed, except with the chance of meeting at other people's tables or parties, man and wife in fashionable life seldom come in contact with each other, and a *tête-à-tête* is a thing almost unknown."

"How very delightful, William! what an interesting picture of domestic felicity!—really I

think that sort of life would suit me exactly —what a pity you are not in the peerage; Lady Beauchamp would be such a pretty title."

"Your jest, dear Blanche, will in all human probability be turned into a reality, much sooner, perhaps, than you imagine."

"What can you mean?" she enquired, with surprise.

"I may confide to you now, dear girl, a secret which has been confined to my own breast, and known only to one besides, my own father, that he is the nearest relation of the Earl of Annandale, who is now in his eighty-ninth year, and heir to his title and estates, the next in succession having died only a few years since; but as the aged peer is still hale and hearty, notwithstanding his advanced age, my father has never alluded to the subject, and you, my own dear Blanche, are the only other person who have been made acquainted with this secret, which I trust implicitly to your keeping. But after your generous confiding love, it is right you should know that the object of your choice is not, even in a worldly point of view, undeserving your preference."

Blanche being too much lost in thought to make any reply, Beauchamp said, "Why, Blanche, is not this very agreeable news?"

"I scarcely know, William, for although I ought to rejoice at your bright prospect, my ideas of perfect happiness are so identified with the name of William Beauchamp and a quiet country life, that I dread entering on a higher sphere, where, as you say, we may be so much separated."

"Dear, dear Blanche, do not conjure up such improbabilities in our case, I am not Lord Beauchamp yet, and may not be for some years; but, as I have before told you, a man's disposition does not change, you have the best security in my jealous feelings against our ever becoming a fashionable couple, and my chief happiness, as you very well know, will be derived like yours from a country life; so now, dear girl, don't anticipate evil, and you may tell aunt Gordon our secret, with injunctions not to betray it; you will then hear what she says to the prospect of her two pets becoming Lord and Lady Beauchamp."

The first dance being concluded, Beauchamp resigned Blanche to Mrs. Gordon's care, and

sought another partner in the person of Miss Honoria Winterbottom, to the delight of her mamma, and disgust of Selina, who had taken a decided antipathy to the whole family.

"Well, I declare," exclaimed Mrs. Winterbottom, as her daughter was led away, "young Squire Beauchamp is the handsomest, best-mannered man in the room; don't you think so, Miss Douglas?"

"He is considered rather good looking," replied Blanche, with a slight blush, and arch expression towards her aunt.

"Rather good looking indeed—hoity, toity! he is downright handsome, miss, and carries himself like a Lord. I only wish he'd take a fancy to our Honoria, and a hundred thousand pounds down ain't to be sneered at."

"That's more than I do," thought Blanche, as she rose to take the arm of Sir Lucius, to whom she was engaged for the next quadrille.

"Well, ma'am," continued Mrs. Winterbottom to aunt Gordon, "that Sir Lucius seems a good sort of a body—looks and speaks like a gentleman, but he is a plain piece of goods, and won't do after the young Squire. Lady Gwynne

would sound very well, no doubt, but then Honoria says she won't marry any one she don't fall desperately in love with, and I shouldn't fancy the Baronet myself, even at my time of life."

"Then," asked aunt Gordon, not a little amused, "what do you think of Captain Markham? he is heir to a baronetcy, and will succeed to a beautiful place and large fortune on Sir Lionel's decease."

"He's too much of a fop to please me, Mrs. Gordon, although tolerably good looking and gentlemanlike; but papa can't endure dandies, and they would never agree, I'm sure. No, ma'am, if I had the pick and choose of the room, the young Squire would come out first, and as you and he seem great friends, can't you just give him a hint that we sha'n't be particular about a few odd thousands if he fancies our Honor."

"You may rest assured on one point," replied Mrs. Gordon, "that Mr. William Beauchamp will never marry for money, and any allusion to your daughter's large expectations would be quite sufficient to keep him at a distance from her."

"Oh, goodness me! then pray don't mention the subject, my dear madam," said Mrs. Winterbottom, "for here he comes with Honoria."

After addressing a few words to the mamma on resigning her daughter, Beauchamp sat down by Mrs. Gordon, saying, "You must not think me rude, dear aunt, if I do not remain very long with you, since I have to enact the part of Master of the Ceremonies to-night; but I shall come for you and Blanche when supper is ready."

"William," whispered Mrs. Gordon, "have you been lecturing Blanche again? she looks very serious."

"No, dear aunt, but I told her a secret which she is to reveal to yourself only, and that which made me feel very happy has rendered her sad—but now she is coming, and will tell you herself—so I must be off."

As Blanche resumed her seat, Mrs. Gordon enquired in a low tone what had caused her such anxious looks, when speaking with Beauchamp.

"Something which William has been telling me, dear aunt; but you must not divulge the

secret. His father is now next heir to an Earldom."

"Good heavens, Blanche, you are joking!"

"No, aunt, indeed I am not;" and she then repeated Beauchamp's communication.

"And has this made you look so serious to-night, you silly child?" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon.

"Yes, dear aunt, I fear he may become a man of the world, and all my dreams of happiness with him, as my constant friend and companion, would then be at an end."

"My dearest Blanche, do not worry yourself thus unnecessarily. William Beauchamp will never change — why should he more than Charles? you don't like him less because he is Lord Malcolm? or Constance either—nonsense, dear child, you ought to feel as happy as I do at this joyful news. Really, it has put me in such spirits, I think I shall have a dance with the old Squire before the ball closes. Only think the surprise of Mrs. Harcourt when she hears my favourite announced some day as Lord Beauchamp. Oh, Blanche, this is indeed a delightful anticipation! how we shall triumph over that match-making pair! But, as William

suggests, we will keep silence on this subject for the present, so now dance away, child, and look as happy and cheerful as you ought to feel."

Beauchamp's next partner was Selina Markham, whom he deemed it necessary to lecture on her behaviour to Mrs. Winterbottom.

"Don't lecture me, Will Beauchamp," exclaimed that self-willed young lady, "your reproofs to me are like water on a duck's back. I don't care a rap for them, and shall treat that odious woman as I please."

"Very well, Selina; if you are determined to raise up another enemy to our sport in the very centre of our best hunting country—pray, do so. Conyers and myself cannot but feel greatly obliged by your kind interference. One such person as Lord Mervyn is quite enough in any country, without your conjuring up a new opponent, whom it is our policy to conciliate, now he has become a landed proprietor in our neighbourhood. We consulted Sir Lionel before inviting them here, and his opinion decided us, when you rush in like a firebrand to set us all in a blaze."

"Then I suppose, Will Beauchamp, I must cry '*peccavi!*' and beg that vulgar woman's pardon."

"No, Selina,—only spare her for the future."

"Very well, I will let her off as easy as possible on your account; and now tell me when you and Blanche are to be married, as since the trial, when you took her up in your arms and carried her out of court, every one says it is a settled thing—the affair with hook-nose created a suspicion, which your other act confirmed."

"Every one is wrong, then, Selina, for it is not a settled thing yet, and I can no more tell you when we are to be married than you can."

"Ah, Master Will, it's no use attempting to throw dust in *my* eyes, for Blanche tells by her looks what she will not confess with her lips—and that little affair with Lord Danby satisfied him, as well as myself, that you are the winner of the prize."

"Should that be the case, Selina, you will not be kept in the dark; but we are now talking of what never may, and cannot happen for some time, knowing the Harcourts' love and

esteem for your humble servant. But people say that you and Conyers are down on the list matrimonial — what say you, guilty or not guilty?"

"I shall not plead at all, Will, and keep you in the dark, as you do me."

"Well, Selina, curiosity is not one of my besetting sins; so I can afford to wait, and will only add, that, were I a woman, I should prefer Bob Conyers to every other man in the county —but here he comes—don't tell him, however, what I say, and I will go and hunt for Blanche to stand your *vis-à-vis*."

Beauchamp soon returned with his fair partner, now radiant with smiles and in high spirits, leaning on his arm in all the confidence of her deep and all-absorbing affection.

"Now, dear girl," he whispered, "you look again like my own dear Blanche," as her eyes met his with an expression of soft unutterable love, "and don't ever doubt the power of fascination you possess to hold me for ever to your side."

"If you begin to flatter me, I shall begin to doubt *you*, Mr. Will."

"Well, then, I will lecture you instead."

"No, William, I will listen to no lectures to-night."

"Then I will advise you that Selina has been trying to fish out of me all about our engagement, on which I have given her no information; so be on your guard, although she suspects how the case stands."

"But surely, William, you may now safely speak to Mr. Harcourt; he will not refuse the heir presumptive to an Earldom."

"Me he would refuse, were I heir to a dukedom, under his present lacerated feelings, which must have time to subside; but we will consult aunt Gordon on the subject, although my own impression is, that he will most decidedly refuse my proposals, and I fear, dear Blanche, that we must have a little more patience."

"For myself, I do not care," she replied; "but it vexes me to see you obliged to use subterfuge and evasion, which imply a doubt of my true feelings towards you, and place you in such a humiliating position."

"Talk not of humiliation, dear Blanche, you have made me one of the proudest men

in existence, and you alone can humble me; for the rest, remember, 'the course of true love never did run smooth,' and I am content to suffer anything for you, so that I am sure of your love."

"Of that you ought to be doubly assured, since I have the prospect of becoming Lady Beauchamp. You are quite safe now, William, if not before—so don't feel jealous again," she replied with a laugh. "Now let us go and sit with aunt Gordon until supper time, for I shall not dance again till I have had a glass of wine, and aunty says she shall drink the health of Lord and Lady Beauchamp in a bumper."

As Blanche and Beauchamp were approaching Mrs. Gordon, they observed the Old Squire and her in earnest conversation evidently engrossed with each other.

"Stay, Blanche," whispered Beauchamp; "my governor looks as if he were making love to aunty;—let us turn aside elsewhere."

"Oh, William, how can you talk such nonsense."

"My dear girl, there is no nonsense in the case, but just the reverse; the Squire considers

your aunt perfection, and there we must both concede—he is not far out in his reckoning. Well, then, what are they both to do, when Malcolm carries off Constance from Bampton, and I run away with you from the Priory? which I propose doing on the very first fitting opportunity, provided you don't give me the slip in London, and run away with some one else first. There will be an old solitary man in one house, and (we must not say old) solitary lady in another. Under these circumstances, as they both suit each other so exactly in disposition, temper, and habits, (fox hunting excepted, and even so far I think the governor might get aunty into the kennel, although the whole household could not put her on horseback) as houses cannot be joined together; the next best thing to be thought of, is to unite the owners—there would then be one house for the old, and the other for the young pair of birds."

"Oh, William! don't talk so foolishly; aunt Gordon would never give up the Priory, and your father would never live anywhere but at Bampton; so your anticipations are very unlikely

to be realised; but I suppose we must divide the year between them."

"No doubt, Blanche, that will be expected of us, as dutiful children, although Malcolm and Constance have promised to spend their winter at Bampton; still, I cannot help thinking, the governor is bent on trying to persuade your aunt, that Beauchamp is a prettier name than Gordon, and as she always will call me 'her dear boy,' my idea is, that the Squire will assail her in this her weak point, and make me a *stepping*-stone to my promotion as her *step*-son. But, my gracious, Blanche, as Mrs. Winter says, don't *hallude* to this delicate *torpeck* with aunty, or I shall get my locks pulled and my ears boxed for my *imperance*. *Lorks*, my dear, just observe how serious they both look—depend upon it, the governor has popped the question."

"What possesses you to night, William, I cannot conceive, to run on in this silly strain?"

"Why, my dear, the fact is, like Mrs. Summertop, I'm rather *swipey*, I suspect."

"Then you are fit company only for that lady, William."

"Very well, my dear, if such is your opinion, I will go and make love to her daughter forthwith, as aunt Gordon tells me I am a great favourite with the young lady. What say you to that proposition?"

"Oh! go, by all means, if you prefer her society to mine," replied Blanche, rather testily.

"That not being exactly the case, you naughty child, I shall keep your arm, and torment you until the supper hour; nevertheless, I am not *swipey*, although intoxicated with delight at seeing Lady Beauchamp, that is to be, in such buoyant spirits. That's all, my dear; so now we will just take a peep into the dining-room, and see how things are arranged for the supper." Where we may leave the company to the enjoyment of the good things provided for them, and jump at once to the conclusion of the ball, when the old Squire of Bampton was joining with Mrs. Gordon in the last dance of the night—Sir Roger de Coverley, as it has been generally called, though by some considered a misnomer.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE month of May, with its balmy breezes, had arrived, and Mrs. Gordon, with Blanche and Constance, were preparing to change their quiet, rational, rural enjoyments for the bustle and fever of London life, Lady Malcolm having insisted on all three taking up their abode with her, for the season, in her old family mansion in Grosvenor Square. The streets of London were not wholly unknown to Blanche Douglas, who had spent the two previous summers with Mrs. Harcourt, for the benefit of the first masters, to complete her education; but the gaieties, festivities, and places of amusement in the mighty

Babylon had hitherto remained as a sealed picture book, which was now to be opened to her expectant view and already excited imagination.

A first season in London, to young girls generally, is, like the "Open Sesame" in the Arabian Nights, looked forward to with as much curious avidity as the opening of a Pandorean box, which is to display to view a perfect fairy scene, for enjoyment of the most exalted description; and it must be admitted that Blanche Douglas was not devoid of pleasurable anticipations from a visit to the gay metropolis, that pleasure being greatly enhanced by having her friend Constance as a participator in all her contemplated gaieties and amusements. There was one great drawback, however, acting as a drag on the wheels of her fancy, which otherwise might have run on without a check—the thought of leaving William Beauchamp (who had now become her second self) alone in the country. There was also another unpleasant reflection which would sometimes obtrude. Constance had invited Miss Honoria, at the ball, to stay a few days at Bampton, and

that romantic young person having taken it into her head or heart to fall desperately in love with her brother (as a grateful return, I suppose, for his sister's kindness), had let fall certain hints in her confidential communications to Constance, which revealed the nature of her feelings towards William Beauchamp. Constance again, in joke, had warned Blanche of the danger to be apprehended from this formidable rival.

"Really, Blanche," she observed one day, "I don't like leaving William behind us, at the mercy of mother and daughter; for what with bags of money on one side, which are daily increasing in number, and such winning smiles, on the other, from the young lady, who has evidently made up her mind to have the young Squire, whether he will or no; we are in what I call rather a disagreeable fix."

"Don't talk so absurdly, Constance," replied Blanche; "as if William would marry a brewer's daughter, to be saddled with such a vulgar mother-in-law, for a hundred thousand a year, instead of as many thousand pounds."

"I'm not afraid of his being tempted by money bags, my dear Blanche; but by the be-

witching smiles of that little Siren Honoria, who, it must be confessed, sings and plays beautifully, and is much more highly accomplished than I had any conception of before her visit to Bampton."

"Then, Constance, his professions of love and attachment to me would be a hollow pretence," replied Blanche.

"Come, sister, dear, don't take my jokes in earnest, and visit my raillery on poor, dear William's head, who, I believe, will ever prove as constant, and turn as true to Blanche Douglas, as the needle to the Pole. Don't fear, my love, that the wealth of Crœsus, or the beauty of Hebe, could shake William's loyalty; but you must ask him to join us in London, and that will be sufficient to ensure his presence."

The day before the breaking-up of the establishment at the Priory, Beauchamp rode over early and inflicted a long lecture on Blanche, which he deemed necessary previous to her first entrance on this new sphere, so surrounded with allurements and temptations.

"The routine of fashionable life in London, my dear girl," said he, "is comprehended in

one word—dissipation. Night there is turned into day, and morning into night. You dine at eight o'clock in the evening, go at ten or eleven to balls and parties, which generally last till three or four o'clock in the morning; come home tired and fevered with the heat of the rooms, and retire to your roost, when the birds have left theirs to warble forth their matutinal songs. Breakfast about eleven; pay or receive visits from three to five, then take your ride or drive in the Park, and return home to dress for dinner about seven. This, with some little variation, is the usual everyday routine of life to those who move in the first circles of fashionable society. But there is one place of amusement, dear girl, although quite the fashion to patronise, which is a disgrace to any Christian country, and that is, without hesitation I say so, the Opera House. Against the singing and music of the Opera, which are, of course, of the very highest order, I have nothing to urge; but the after-piece, or ballet, is an exhibition from which every pure-minded woman must turn with shame and disgust; and I am quite sure that, if perforce obliged to witness

one scene of this kind, you will never be induced to be present at another. Although I hope you may be safely trusted to Malcolm's or aunt Gordon's care, who will protect you from witnessing all such objectionable exhibitions."

"And yet, dear William, without you I shall feel desolate and lonely; and you know, but for your promise of joining me in town, I would never have accepted Lady Malcolm's invitation. Tell me, then, when I may expect you there, and if you love, do not disappoint me."

"Will this day week, Blanche, satisfy you, giving time for a few arrangements which I must make before leaving home?"

"Yes, William, I will be content, if you cannot name an earlier day."

"If possible, dear girl, I will leave home sooner; but by this day week, if living and well, you shall see me at this hour in Grosvenor Square."

"Thank you, my own dear William, for your kind compliance with my wishes, which has made me quite happy; although I now sincerely wish I had never consented to leave the

Priory, for I have no pleasure anywhere without you."

"For which pretty little complimentary speech, my love, I must reward you in my usual way. And now, recollect, I shall expect every day a true and particular account of all your thoughts and doings in London, until you are once more under my individual *espionnage*."

The promise being given, terminated the interview between the lovers, and Blanche returned to the house to complete her preparations for the morrow, Beauchamp having agreed to dine and sleep at the Priory that night, and see them off on their journey early the next morning.

Beauchamp, being of a very reflective and rather melancholy turn of mind, was sitting before dinner in an easy chair, with his face buried in his hands, absorbed in sad forebodings, a heavy sigh having just escaped his lips, when a gentle hand was laid upon his arm, and a sweet voice whispered in his ear—

"Dear William, what has caused that deep sigh?"

"The thought, my own precious child," said

he, rising and clasping her to his heart, "of the many miles by which I shall be separated, this time to-morrow, from her I love so dearly; and the dread, which I cannot dispel, of that change which may be effected in your present pure feelings by dissipation and worldly influences. Many an innocent, chaste girl like yourself, hitherto cheerful, happy, and contented in her rural home, has, after a season in town, returned thither an altered being,—peevish, fretful, unhappy, and discontented,—longing again for the excitement of those scenes which have rendered her dissatisfied and miserable in domestic life."

"You think, then, William, that I have no self-control or strength of mind, but like a child shall be led astray and taken captive by the glittering allurements of the fashionable world?"

"Heaven grant, dear girl, that you may ever continue, as now, a child in simplicity of heart and thought; yet how few of the greatest and best of mankind, even the most favoured children of the Almighty, have been able to resist temptation in their hour of trial, or whose minds have not been affected by those follies

and vices to which all human nature is so prone to yield. Lady Malcolm is, I fear, a votary of fashion, and when once engaged in that vortex of dissipation, of balls, routs, plays, operas, concerts, dinner-parties, &c. &c., your mind having become enervated or overstrained by unnatural excitement, you will find yourself imperceptibly gliding down that current which has carried thousands to destruction. Flattery also, which none can wholly withstand, will lend her aid to beguile and reconcile you to this new mode of life. Can you wonder, then, dear girl, that my thoughts are troubled at the risk you will incur when entering so young and inexperienced on these treacherous and deceptive scenes? Were you to be changed from that dear, artless, unaffected girl I now hold in my arms, into a flirting, heartless woman of fashion, the now bright dawning of my earthly happiness would sink into endless night. That dear form, too, although so beautiful, so enchanting to my enraptured vision, is but as the fair casket, containing a far more precious jewel within —a chaste and unsullied heart, which I value beyond all price. Oh, Blanche! that you may

be restored to me as you now leave me, is my constant, anxious prayer."

"Dear, dear William, do not distress yourself by these forebodings of evil, or doubt my constant, unfailing love, which will strengthen and support me in every trial; and knowing how much your happiness depends on me, and is now confided to my keeping, rest assured that consideration alone would be sufficient, had I no stronger motives, to prevent that change you dread; but unless you are with me also, my fashionable career in London will be short indeed; and when you leave town, aunt Gordon and myself have resolved to return to the Priory."

Malcolm, entering the room at this moment, exclaimed—

"Ah, Beauchamp, at the old game again, lecturing Blanche, I conclude, from those tearful eyes. Really, my dear fellow, there is sometimes too much of a good thing; but all your advice will be thrown away after a month in town, by which time you will find this country lassie converted into an airified town belle, receiving the homage of numerous slaves,

attracted by her beauty and grace, with the dignity of a princess. You will get lectured yourself then, my boy, and ordered to the right about in double quick time."

"Take care Constance does not serve you the same trick, Malcolm."

"Egad! I should not be marvellously astonished if she did, Beauchamp, and therefore I shall keep a pretty sharp look out;—but she shall have her run of gaiety,—go everywhere, and see everything, for it is far better to have it over before we are married, and if so disposed, to turn restive, the blow won't fall so heavily upon me now as it would later, when we are coupled together."

"You can do as you please with Constance, who is strong and able to take care of herself; but I must entreat, Malcolm, Blanche may not be dragged here, there, and everywhere, for her constitution will not endure much dissipation."

"Well, Beauchamp, then come up and take care yourself of the dear, precious little soul. Why, Blanche, he seems to think you are made of barley-sugar. What a life you will lead when married to such a fussy, prosy, particular old

fellow. Take my advice, child, and marry some dashing, high-spirited young man about town."

"Who would try to kill me with dissipation, Charles, that he might spend my fortune on himself—that would be a *cannie* thing for a Scotchwoman to do. No, no, Charlie dear; I prefer being my old man's darling, to any gay young man's slave."

"Quite right, my prudent little cousin; and a precious darling you will be, no doubt, in his opinion. But now let us have dinner," ringing the bell; "Aunty and Con are uncommonly late, and I can wait no longer."

The dinner-hour passed heavily away—Lord Malcolm making ineffectual efforts to enliven the party; but nothing could rouse Beauchamp from his abstraction and his sorrowful looks, fixed alternately on Blanche and Mrs. Gordon, infected them all.

"Confound your sour-crout visage," exclaimed Malcolm. "Why, Beauchamp, you are like a wet blanket in a frosty night—enough to congeal one's blood. Rouse, rouse yourself, my dear fellow; and here, Blanche, fill his glass, to our next merry meeting at the Priory."

"May that meeting find us all unchanged in heart and feelings," exclaimed Beauchamp, impressively, as he placed his empty glass on the table.

"And Will Beauchamp," added Malcolm, gaily, in a more lively humour. "And now, aunty, with your leave, I will ring for another bottle of wine; or, by Jove! we shall find him suspended by the neck from the old chestnut tree on the lawn to-morrow morning—or stay—his razors —egad! aunt, you and Blanche had better take them away and hide them—no saying what he may do, now this blue fit is upon him."

"Do leave William alone, Charles," replied Mrs. Gordon.

"I dare not, aunty, dear, until he has swallowed a bottle of wine, which may keep him from committing *felo de se* until to-morrow evening, when Miss Honoria Winterbottom will perhaps enliven him with her innocent prattle and sweet musical strains, or her ma' and the old squire may, all four, get comfortably merry together."

"Charles," exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, rising to

leave the room, "you are incorrigible—but remember, we must retire early to-night."

We will draw a veil over the parting scene between Blanche and Beauchamp the following morning, after which he handed her to the carriage in silence, not daring to trust his voice in a last farewell; and Blanche sunk back on the cushion, to conceal her fast falling tears. When shaking hands with Mrs. Gordon, Constance, and Malcolm, the firm grasping of their hands in his, proved, more than words could tell, what his feelings were, although utterance failed him from emotion, which, unable longer to control, he turned quickly away, and rushed towards the stables for his horse.

"There goes," said Malcolm, "a man whose deep feelings are almost, if not quite, a misery to himself; and I fear Will Beauchamp is more to be pitied than envied for the possession of too sensitive a heart."

"Oh no, Charles," replied Mrs. Gordon, "it is that very profound depth and delicacy of feeling, which has so endeared him to me since a boy, and made me love him as my own son."

"Ah, aunty, dear, he is, I know, a paragon

of perfection in your eyes—but, notwithstanding his heart is in the right place, he is confoundedly jealous, and haughty too; and I suspect we shall have a scene or two with him in town, if my sweet cousin there attracts many admirers."

"I do not wish to have any more admirers, Charles," replied Blanche; "and will take care never again to give William the slightest cause for uneasiness on that account."

"A noble resolution, my unsophisticated little pet; but, as a cat may look at a king, I conclude men may look at and admire Blanche Douglas without being thought very impertinent. But wait a little, my love; and, when you have been a month in London, you will think very differently on these matters."

"I hope never, Charles," was the reply, which, being echoed by Mrs. Gordon and Constance, prevented Lord Malcolm from venturing any further remarks on the supposed fickleness of the fair sex.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE hurry and excitement of travelling with four-post horses, and the ever-varying objects on the road, roused and diverted Blanche Douglas from giving unchecked indulgence to more gloomy thoughts; Mrs. Gordon using her best endeavours also, to draw her attention to other things. But still, the unbidden tear would glisten in her eye, as she dwelt on her parting with him whom she loved far beyond every human being; and save when losing the kind instructress of her early years, this pang of separation from Beauchamp, (although believing it to be of so short a duration) was the most

bitter she had ever experienced. To her, Beauchamp had stood successively in the place of brother, friend, and lover. She had regarded him first with the affection of a sister ; then esteemed him as a friend, and now loved him, with all the intensity of which her gentle confiding nature was susceptible, as her affianced husband.

The shadows of evening were lengthening, as the heavy double-bodied carriage, containing the late inmates of the Priory, rattled through the streets of London, and drew up in Grosvenor Square. The door of Lady Malcolm's mansion was immediately thrown open by the expectant porter, and Malcolm leading the way to the drawing-room, was soon folded in his mother's arms, Mrs. Gordon, Blanche, and Constance following closely upon his footsteps, and each greeted in turn by a warm embrace and most cordial reception.

" Really, Margaret," exclaimed Lady Malcolm, " I should scarcely have recognized Blanche again, she is become such a tall, handsome, stately girl ; well, I declare, my love," taking her hand in hers, and earnestly scanning her features,

" you will create quite a sensation in the *Beau Monde*, and I shall feel justly proud of my *protégée*. But now, my dears, you must be greatly fatigued after your long journey, and I will shew you your rooms. Dinner will be ready at eight o'clock precisely, and as we are quite *en famille* this evening, you need not bestow much time on your toilet."

Lady Malcolm, being Mrs. Gordon's eldest sister, resembled her very much in personal appearance, and disposition also, although taller, and more fashionable in manners from her constantly mixing in the first circles in London society; and it must be confessed, she was at heart rather a woman of the world, deriving her chief enjoyment from its gaieties.

Although much pleased with her niece's first appearance, she was in raptures when Blanche entered the drawing-room the second time, dressed for dinner.

" Why, my dear girl," she exclaimed, " you are really quite enchanting when divested of your travelling dress; I had no idea of that beautiful figure and graceful demeanour; you will be the belle of the season, and with your fortune

and position, dukes and earls will be paying homage at your feet."

"Indeed, I hope not, aunt Malcolm," replied Blanche, blushing deeply.

"And why not, my dear? it is nothing more than your due, and what I fully expect; so get rid of your country diffidence and blushes as soon as you possibly can, which here would only pass for *gaucherie* or *mauvaise honte*."

Constance in her turn elicited some very flattering encomiums from Lady Malcolm, exceedingly gratifying to her son, who replied, "Well, my dear mother, I think we may show our two girls against any two in London; but they must not be spoilt by too many compliments or too much indulgence, as we keep them pretty strict in the country—don't we, aunt Gordon?—for fear of their running away."

"Oh, Charles," interposed Lady Malcolm, "you must give me a full account of all those dreadful proceedings with that *mauvais sujet*, Lord Vancourt. The maddest scheme I ever heard of; but he has always been a wild reckless man, and living almost by his wits the last three or four seasons."

"It was a well-planned scheme, though, my dear mother, and Blanche had a narrow escape from being whipped off to the land of cakes; for had Will Beauchamp arrived ten minutes later, that villain would have had her safe enough in his travelling carriage."

"Well, Charles, you must tell me all particulars after dinner; and how are my friends, the old and young Squires of Bampton and Sir Lionel?"

"Well and hearty; and you may expect the honour of a visit from Will next week, who is coming up to town to look after us all, and prevent these girls being ruined by too much dissipation; as he does not consider a couple of aunts and one man cousin sufficient to keep them within proper bounds."

"I shall be delighted, Charles, to see my young friend again, as you know he has ever been a pet of mine."

"Yes, my dear mother, and since be has grown up a tall, good-looking young man, he has now become a pet of young as well as old ladies."

"Indeed, Charles, that is not at all an unlikely

thing to occur; but who are the young ladies you allude to?".

"Oh!" replied Charles, carelessly, "there is a brewer's daughter, with a hundred and fifty thousand pounds, more or less, with her pa' and ma' hard at him; and one or two other demoiselles—(casting a significant look at Blanche, who blushed and trembled with apprehension)—I suspect, have set their caps at him; but two to one on Miss Winterbottom are the current odds at present."

"Miss *Who*, Charles?"

"Winterbottom, my lady mother,—the great brewer's daughter."

"Goodness, what a name!" exclaimed Lady Malcolm, in amazement.

"Yes; just fancy the electrical effect of such a name being passed up from flunkey to flunkey on one of your grand reception nights! why, my dear mother, the cry of 'the roof on fire' in a crowded theatre, would be nothing in comparison to the consternation created among your aristocratic friends by such an announcement, who would rush down stairs without waiting for their carriages."

" Indeed, I could never receive such people in my house; but surely William Beauchamp does not seriously think of marrying this girl?"

" No saying, my dear mother, she is a pretty, fascinating, artful little hussy."

" Then, Charles, write directly, and ask him to come up without delay, as I know the very person to suit him, a rich young widow, just five-and-twenty, very handsome, agreeable, and pleasing in manners, with eight thousand a-year at her own disposal; and Beauchamp is the very person she would fall in love with, as she dislikes her present set of admirers, all being too foppish or fashionable for her ideas of a husband; in fact she declared to me the other day, the character she would select would be a manly, unaffected person, of firm principles and unblemished reputation, whom she could respect as well as love."

" Well, then, Blanche, your old playmate, Will Beauchamp, is the very man to suit her—don't you think so, my dear?"

" I really cannot say, Charles," she replied, very shortly.

" At any rate, pray write to him to-morrow,"

resumed Lady Malcolm, " and save him from the brewery ;—Beauchamp, Winterbottom, and Co. ! this would be dreadful."

" It shall be done, my dear mother, if you particularly desire it ; but Will Beauchamp is a very obstinate, perverse young fellow, and if he has set his affections on Miss Honoria or any other young lady—(with a smile at Blanche)—all the widows in London won't turn him."

The announcement of dinner was a reprieve to poor Blanche, who dreaded lest her cousin's raillery might lead Lady Malcolm to suspect her attachment to Beauchamp, as the Harcourts, who had just arrived in London, would of course be frequent visitors at her house ; and it had been resolved by Mrs. Gordon, before leaving the Priory, to keep her engagement a profound secret for the present—even from her own sister. Lord Malcolm, notwithstanding his love of fun and frolic, with which he could not forbear teasing Blanche occasionally, was too sincerely attached to her and Beauchamp, to betray their position even to his own mother ; and although sometimes venturing within the precincts of the forbidden ground, yet he possessed sufficient tact

to perceive how far he could advance without discovery, and made amends for any little *escapade* of this kind, by his unwavering determination to serve his friend in more important points.

The next day Lady Malcolm was "not at home to visitors," thinking her sister would prefer one day's quietude after her journey; but she could not resist the temptation of taking Blanche and Constance for what is termed *an airing* (although generally proving a dusting) in the park, at the fashionable hour, when, from the multiplicity of carriages, anything beyond a walking pace is extremely problematical. The slow order of rotation in which the wheels move serves, however, in place of a *conversazione* for the equestrians who are seen lounging by the side of those wheels which contain anything like a pretty face, or a *partie* in other respects desirable, discussing the fashionable topics of the day. Numerous were the polite bows of recognition directed to Lady Malcolm by her aristocratic acquaintances on passing her carriage. But the two most pertinacious affixions to each side of the carriage were Lord Henry Bayntum (second

son of the Duke of R——) and Sir John Martingale, a young sporting baronet of large fortune, both well known to Lord Malcolm, who being introduced to Blanche and Constance, maintained their position for some time to the exclusion of several others, equally attracted by the beauty of the fair occupants of Lady Malcolm's carriage, and hovering near in the hopes of an introduction.

Lord Henry having exhausted his fund of topics, generally considered so entertaining and interesting to young ladies, about the opera, balls, parties, reunions, receptions, and other such gaieties, *quocunque nomine gaudent*, and receiving very unsatisfactory replies from Blanche to his various enquiries as to meeting her at the Duchess of C——'s party on the 10th; the Countess of D——'s ball on the 12th; or Lady Mary W——'s grand concert, at the Hanover Square Rooms on the 14th, he raised his hat and withdrew; being soon after joined by the baronet, who had likewise expended his stock of ammunition on Constance with little better success.

"Well, Bayntum," enquired Martingale, "what do you think of the heiress?"

"Nonplussed, my dear fellow — can't make her out; fine, handsome girl, with splendid eyes and beautiful complexion, that is all I know— but for conversation, whether from reserve or shyness, I could not get her to speak a dozen words."

"She don't fancy you, I suppose, Bayntum— not good looking enough."

"Well, as to that, Martingale, I flatter myself, that is not the reason, unless every mirror I look into is a false reflector. But how did you fare with Miss Beauchamp?"

"Oh, well enough whilst we conversed on country affairs, fox-hunting; riding, &c., but we came to a dead stop at the very threshold of the Opera House; in short, these two girls are only just fresh up from the country; but we shall soon alter them to town paces and town faces also."

"Well, Martingale, I'm for the heiress, mind, who with her ten thousand a-year would suit my book exactly."

"Ay, I dare say, Bayntum, and make up for that devilish bad book you made on the St. Leger of last year. That was a most un-

toward event, my dear fellow; and if you go often at that killing pace, ten thousand a-year won't hold out with *you* very long. Moreover, Malcolm, although a capital fellow, is a *cannie* Scot at bottom, unco sharp about the siller, and, depend upon it he will take proper care that his cousin's money is made safe enough to herself before she marries."

"If I can win the young lady over to my side, Martingale, the odds against Malcolm are fifty to one; so I shall try my luck, at any rate."

As Lord Hervey retired from Lady Malcolm's carriage, Lord Danby, who had been watching for the opportunity, drew up on the same side, and his sudden appearance caused the colour to rise on Blanche's cheeks, from the remembrance of their last parting at the Priory. The whole occurrences of that eventful day, instantly rising to her mind, caused such a revulsion of feeling that her agitation became perceptible to Lady Malcolm, as she could scarcely at first reply to Lord Danby's salutation; but, soon recovering herself, she answered his several inquiries with such marked indifference and coolness as to

convince him that the sentence she had been forced to pronounce was not likely to be reversed or re-considered. Danby, on witnessing her confusion at first and subsequent reserve, was almost puzzled how to interpret her reception of him; but, after several ineffectual attempts to draw her into conversation, he thought it more prudent to withdraw for the present; and Blanche, leaning back in the carriage, with her parasol before her face, resolved thereby to exclude any further advances from other attendant cavaliers. Lady Malcolm said:—

"I fear, my dear girl, you have not yet recovered from your fatigue of yesterday; we will, therefore, return home. But how did you become acquainted with Lord Danby?"

"I was introduced to him first at the Hunt ball, aunt Malcolm; and met him often afterwards whilst he was staying at Barton Court."

"Well, my dear, being heir to a rich Dukedom, he is very much courted, and highly spoken of as a most agreeable, unaffected young man; and, of course, a most desirable acquaintance."

Blanche not appearing disposed to continue

the conversation about Lord Danby, Constance interposed some other remarks to save her friend; and the carriage soon after set them down in Grosvenor Square.

END OF VOL. II.

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